the borders of our lives

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by circlegames

Summary

It’s not until 1973 that Charlie thinks it isn’t all a dream. Knox has his head in the toilet, there’s a groupie smoking in his connected room, and it hits Charlie all too suddenly that this isn’t what he wanted when he and Meeks decided drunkenly one night they’d start a band.

Or: a portrait of the first few years and final decisions about their band, Letters From The Fight.

where i'm bound, i can't tell

It's not until 1973 that Charlie thinks it isn't all a dream. Knox has his head in the toilet, there's a groupie smoking in his connected room, and it hits Charlie all too suddenly that this isn't what he wanted when he and Meeks decided one night they'd drunkenly start a band.

"You leave anything here?" He asks the groupie, who is putting her cigarette out on the carpet of Knox's room.

"Haven't even started anything yet." She grumbles, and they don't say anything more before she slips out of the door.

As soon as she's gone, Charlie's back in the bathroom, a sinking feeling rolling around in his stomach. "Knox?"

He can't hear anything over the wrenching sounds, but Knox groans in response. Charlie's on the ground in a blink of an eye.

"What'd you take?" He's asking desperately, and Knox pulls himself from the toilet, shaggy bangs in his face. They're plastered to his face with all the sweat. "What'd you take?" Charlie huffs, his hands on Knox's back, steadying him.

"Nothing," He coughs, and throws his head back into the toilet.

"Knox," It's a warning. They've done this before, the roles reversed. That was nearly eight months ago, in the longest, worst leg of a European tour Charlie could ever have imagined. He hadn't slept in four days because of all the coke, and then he'd nearly overdosed after a cocktail of pills, all handed to him by various groupies or the people

they were touring with.

Knox had rushed him to the hospital, muttering incoherently about how he had to take care of himself. It had been a terrible night, and even worse as the coke wore off subsequently during the next period of time.

“It’s nothin’, Char.” Knox chokes, and then he’s hurling again. Nothing’s coming out, but he’s wretching so badly his whole body is shaking.

“Knox?”

It’s another few moments before Knox can answer. He pulls himself away, his forehead drenched in sweat, his lips quivering. He’s shivering, and there seems to be something bubbling at the surface.

“What’s the matter?” Charlie asks, because he wants to believe that Knox isn’t using. He’s never seen him do anything, but the road gets hard. They’ve all had brushes with things they regret.

“I haven’t slept in three days.” He answers, the exhaustion suddenly so clear upon his face that Charlie doesn’t know how he didn’t see it sooner.

“What?”

“I just can’t.”

“What’s that got to do with this? Did you get food poisoning or something?”

“No,” Knox shrugs, “I’m just tired. You can get sick from that.”

“We gotta get you to bed.”

“I’ve tried, Charlie, but I can’t. I just can’t sleep.” Knox is pulling himself up, the nausea subsiding. He drags himself wearily to the sink, hanging onto it tightly.

“Knox,” Charlie’s gripping his hips, trying to keep him upright. Knox has got about three inches on him, but it feels like more now. Like he’s towering over him. Charlie wonders briefly if that was how it felt while Knox dragged him to get his stomach pumped that night.

“I’m fine, Charlie.”

“I sent that girl on your couch home.”

“I figured.”

“What were you thinking going on stage tonight? You should have told me you felt like this.”

“I was fine. The adrenaline,” Knox is explaining, but he’s not really saying anything at all.

“What’s the matter?”

Knox looks up at him through his bleary eyes in the mirror. He feels a deep thud settle in his chest because of all people, he didn’t want Charlie to see him like this. He was supposed to be the strong one of the two. The one that picked him up off of the ground and could take care of himself just fine. Charlie’d done enough in their childhood to account for all the years he was doing now.

“Talk to me,” Charlie says, his voice a bit above a whisper as his hold on Knox tightens. Knox would be spinning if it wasn’t for the sick feeling settling in his body.

“I am fine, Charlie. I’m just tired.”

“I know that, but…” Charlie could feel his insides rearranging, trying to make more space for all this hurt within his bones.

“Go back to your room. I’ll be fine.” Knox said, his toothbrush clacking against his teeth.

“No.”

“I’m fine, alright?” Knox says it through the paste, so it’s garbled, but Charlie can see from his eyes in the mirror that he means it. Knox may mean it, but it isn’t enough to let him feel like he’s off the hook.

“No.” Charlie tightens his hands on Knox’s hips, feels the scorch of his pinky that’s trailed underneath Knox’s tank and sitting atop his plaid pajama bottoms; the burn that’s coursing through his veins.

Knox spits, and then stills completely as he looks at Charlie through the mirror. His skin is burning from the touch, his head is swimming, and he feels like he's unable to grab anything. His fingers feel like they're slipping from the counter.

"What the fuck d'ya mean, no?"

"I'm not going anywhere."

"Charlie," It comes out a huff. Knox knows he's defenseless right now, too bone tired to do anything about it, and Charlie's stubborn. Always has been.

"You gotta go to bed, Knox."

"I know. I am. I will."

Charlie lets go of him then, and they trudge out to the bed part of the hotel. Knox goes about checking on things: the alarm he's set, his journal in his suitcase, his pack of Marlboros. By the time he's checked everything and taken off his socks, he finds Charlie curled into his bed.

"I have a couch," Knox grumbles, slinking carefully into the space next to his oldest friend.

"Yeah," Charlie looks a bit crushed, like his gesture of their age old slumber parties had left Knox's mind all together.

“You’re fine,” Knox says a smile tinting through it, “Just giving you a hard time.” He shivers, although the sheets are reaching his chin.

Charlie’s a hydrant of heat. He always has been and tonight was no different, and so it took no effort or decision for Charlie to close the space between their bodies and wrap himself around Knox.

“You need a sweater or something?”

“Fine. Just tired,”

“How long has it been like this?”

Knox shifts in the arms, the scorch of them electrifying and comforting, like Charlie’s arms always had been. “Few months now,” He staggers through the rest. “Been having bad nightmares, I guess. Can’t get good sleep anymore, and I’m too afraid to take anything to help.”

“Maybe you’ll sleep well tonight.” Charlie offers, his breath hot on Knox’s neck. Knox can’t see him, but he doesn’t need to. He knows how dangerous it would be to turn around and fall in love all over again like that night when he was 12.

“Maybe,” Knox is still shivering from the exhaustion. “If I wake up screaming, don’t say anything.”

“I’ll fight ‘em off,” Charlie says, and Knox can feel the pride in his chest, can feel how he almost feels like the old Charlie behind him.

The Charlie that was muscular and full, much unlike the Charlie he'd come to know in recent years. It was a comfort to know that he was coming back into himself. "I'll fight all the damn monsters off. The dragons too."

"Where's your armor?"

"I'm wearing it. Can't you feel it?" Charlie chuckles, small and low. It tickles the back of Knox's neck, and Charlie pulls him closer. His arm snakes around Knox's waist and finds his hand, threading their fingers together.

"Yeah," Knox whispers, unsure if Charlie can even hear him, unsure why the gesture makes him want to cry. "I feel it."

Charlie breathes easy after that, and as Knox seems to drift away in his arms, his own head starts spinning. *Months* . Knox has been sick from this exhaustion for months, and nobody noticed much of anything. He feels sick from that, from the implications. They've all been so busy the last few months. Getting back to touring, touring in America, getting through the festivals and the other bands around them breaking up and all the goddamn interviews. It's been hard. Harder than Charlie had wanted it to be all those years ago.

1969

"Are we fucking going or what?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Charlie asks, a half eaten pear in his mouth.

“Woodstock, baby!” Meeks all but roars, placing the paper in front of them. “Everybody’s gonna be there.”

“Everybody who?”

“Charlie,” Knox says it like an admonishment, “Everybody.”

“And?”

“It’s a festival out in Woodstock. Joan Baez, Jefferson Airplane, Janis Joplin, Jimmy Hendrix. Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young. Everybody’s who’s anybody is gonna be there.”

“Bob Dylan?”

“He’s out.”

“What?” Knox asks, but it isn’t answered.

“I have four tickets, and they’ve got our names on them.”

“I don’t know, Meeksie.”

Meeks shook his head, clearly frustrated. “So you’re coming?”

“This isn’t gonna make you want to start a band, right?”

“No promises, baby.”

“Who else is coming?”

“Pitts is free.”

“Pitts is always free if you’re involved.”

“You’re just jealous one of us can pull off having a healthy relationship.” Knox said, taking a seat next to Charlie at the table.

“Oh fuck off,” Charlie says, unbothered by Meek’s watchful eyes.

Recently, Meeks has been watching a little too closely as Knox and Charlie bump around each other. Charlie is pretty sure he’s the only one who has confessed anything to Meeks, and he didn’t even mean to confess anything in the first place. He knows that Meeks would never say anything, but he’s been looking at them so pitifully lately. He wishes it would stop.

Besides, he and Knox keep to themselves in their own ways. They date, girls and guys or whoever comes their way. Knox prefers romantic gestures, movies and picnics in the park and writing poems for them. Charlie has always preferred a good one night stand over anything, really, especially if he’s down in the dumps. Of course, there had been that one time Charlie had seen Knox and a guy he’d seen a few times in the apartment. Most notably, the time he’d come home from work at the bar early, to find Knox pushed up against their kitchen counter, having the life sucked out of him. No one had heard

him enter, and Knox had just tightened his grip on the guy's head, his eyes going wide only a moment as he saw Charlie. He'd never officially come out to him, and they hadn't mentioned it if Knox was with a guy. Charlie made a face that signaled that he was sorry, and he wanted to move quicker, but Knox's eyes had planted him in place a few moments too long. Knox was making noises that made Charlie's hair stand up straight at the back of his neck. He excused himself back out the door a moment later, hoping he'd been just as silent leaving as he'd been entering.

But, that pair had fizzled out quickly, and Charlie was pretty sure it had hurt when they'd broken up. He'd never really met him, and he wasn't ever going to. Knox loved hard, fast, and deeply; and he knew that that heartache was going to follow him anywhere he went.

"You okay, Charlie?" Knox asks, his eyes settling on him.

"Yeah," Charlie nodded, too lost in his head.

"So it's settled, wierdos?" Meeks says, twirling the phone chord in his fingers, "Woodstock?"

"Yeah," Charlie nods, "Woodstock."

i'm going to try and get my soul free

Chapter Summary

The journey out. 1969.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1969

“This is going to be the worst weekend of my life, and the Beatles aren’t even on the line up.” Charlie complains from the passenger’s seat, swatting Knox’s hand away from the radio that’s blaring “I Need You.”

“I wish I loved somebody this much.” Meeks laments from the back, passing a cigarette around with Pitts.

“You are so fucking dramatic. Stop,” Pitts rolls his eyes, taking the cigarette out of his mouth to kiss Meeks so deeply that he sees stars.

“I don’t know how much longer they’re going to last, no matter how much I want them to last forever.” Knox replies, handing back another magazine he’d been looking through. “Can you two stop?”

“Don’t even joke about that.” Charlie shakes his head, casting a glance that makes Knox burst into laughter, giving him an earned swat back.

“He’s right. They're probably tired! I mean, shit, they’ve been at it for so long now. They’re all married and stuff. Probably want to have families. Plus they have all that fucking press.” Meeks says, coming up for air to hang between Charlie and Knox, his long red hair just

touching his freckled shoulders.

“I just can’t imagine the world without them.” Charlie confesses.

“There’s no way they’re over yet!” Knox says, “Something’s coming from those guys.”

“This is so depressing,” Pitts is next to join the gang, wedging himself to look through the front window. “Let’s leave the subject.”

“I think you could write something this good Knox.” Meeks says, breaking the current conversation to turn up the radio once again, another Beatles song. “In My Life.”

Knox laughs, a sound that reverbs through the whole van, a gift from Meeks’s dad for his twentieth birthday. “I’m not McCartney, and there’s no way I’m Lennon.”

“You’re a Harrison.” Pitts agrees.

“No way. He’d write like Dylan.” Charlie sounds offended, like everybody in the van has the outs for him.

“You are so obsessed.” Meeks rolls his eyes, smiling despite himself.

“What?”

“You’re so obsessed with him. Bob Dylan this, Bob Dylan that. I’m

going to go insane!”

“I lived through your Beatlemania!”

“I lived through yours!” It takes about a split second before Charlie and Meeks are off, fighting like siblings.

“None of these people are even going to be here! Let’s focus on what’s important: Joan Baez.” Pitts breaks the two apart so that Charlie can go back to what’s important, driving.

“I don’t even write,” Knox mumbles, bringing up the previous conversation. “Not really.”

“Not for us maybe.” Meeks smacks his cheek, giggling evilly as he gets into the back.

The two crawled to the back, and the silence of the radio overtakes the two up front again. It’s something everyone is sure Meeks has been thinking of for months. He wants to start a band. Charlie’s a fairly good singer and a fairly good guitar player. Meeks knows how to play the drums. Knox knows how to play the bass and he thinks if they asked nicely, Pitts would play lead guitar. He’s pretty brilliant at it. Of course, he might also not want to be in a band with the three of them, but he’d probably say yes in a heartbeat if they asked nicely (or out of pity).

“What are you thinking about?” Charlie asks, his voice low compared to the chatter and the radio, which is playing another Beatles song.

“How Meeks’s gonna make us start a fucking band.”

“Yeah,” Charlie laughs, “Do you ever write anything the rest of us could read?”

“Maybe,” Knox shakes his head, and feels that gap between them widen. He hasn’t come to Charlie with things in a few months. He wasn’t sure how to. Ever since that incident of Charlie finding him in the kitchen, it’s been a bit awkward to talk about anything for too long. Knox had never come out officially to him, and that was how he’d inevitably found out.

They hadn’t been like they were back at Welton in months. Welton had been long, shared conversations in a bed without a single soul to hear them, swapping ties and clothes and tying their shoelaces together as pranks. Those years were a long time over. They were still close, but their separate, mostly private dating lives had flung the two on their axis’, causing a rift that Knox was sure if opened any wider, would swallow them both whole.

“What kind of stuff do you write?”

“Poems, mostly. I try to write love poems when I go out, if I want to. I guess I’m trying to be a little bit like Dylan.”

“Told you so,” Charlie smiles, his eyes refocusing on the highway. It isn’t too far to Woodstock, but there’s traffic, and Meeks had been too frantic over what to wear, so they’d had a late start.

They’d all dressed nicely, but Pitts had warned that while it was going to be a good three days, it was also going to be the worst three days of their lives. The setting was a farm, and so all three were a little worried at how conditions would fair when it wasn’t about the music. By taking Meeks’s van, a masterpiece of its self, they were at least

going to have a place to sleep. The exterior was a light purple, and the interior was nicely done. It wasn't the Ritz, but none of them were asking for a five star hotel. It would be tight, but they'd have just enough space to snuggle tightly together in the back. Meeks and Pitts had packed plenty of snacks and little meals and more than enough refreshments to last them for a lifetime. Pitts was a prepared guy, and they were all grateful. Had it been just Charlie and Knox, they'd probably have slept on the ground. But, thanks to him, they were going to be sleeping on the pillows and blankets they'd all scrounged together and placed in the back.

With the concert so close, Knox looked again at an itinerary that Meeks had given to him and Charlie. It looked like a packed time, and he wasn't sure how they were going to make all of them. He and Charlie wanted to see The Who, The Grateful Dead, and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. Pitts was eager to see Joan Baez the most, although they were all pretty excited for her. Meeks, most of all, wanted to see what kind of people it attracted. He was eager to be around like-minded, free thinking people. He was quite desperate for it. Pitts was too, and they hoped that maybe they'd even get to hold hands as the night wore on.

"What's your favorite?"

"Hm?"

"Of your stuff. I didn't know you wrote so much, I guess." Knox had written a lot in high school, but they were always love poems and diary entries. Stuff he never let Charlie see. What did Meeks know about it?

"It's just stuff. Nothing too important or anything like that."

"Really?"

“You don’t have to analyze me, Charlie.”

“I’m not.” Charlie shifted, the tension between them gathering up again in puddles, lapping at the sand like waves along the ocean. They didn’t know how to interact anymore, not with the relationship that had barely been spoken about having just ended, and they couldn’t talk about it with Meeks so close, as he was always watching or asking questions they didn’t feel like answering. “I just want…” His voice trailed off, and he looked over to Knox, whose eyes were already on his own.

“What?”

“Nothing,” Charlie shook his head, “Nothing.”

They lapsed into silence again, the radio blaring a different hit. The lovers were laughing in the back, but they couldn’t register much of anything. It was all too much, suddenly. Too stifling. And they hadn’t even reached the venue yet. It was bound to be a long weekend, and they were all excited, but there had been so much talk about the event that they really didn’t know what they were going to be getting into. In the end, it was okay. They were all together, and whatever was coming their way, they’d be together in it.

Chapter End Notes

> I am so crazy sorry. Am recycling many old stories and will probably do so for a long time here. YAYYYYY!!!! Also I don't care Knox poet erasure is always happening he wants to write love poetry for people he has crushes on. I will let him.

i want you so bad it's driving me mad

Chapter Summary

1969. 2 weeks after Woodstock.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Fuck,” Meeks mutters, laughing wildly as Pitts tries riff after riff. They’re listening to the radio, and it’s playing a Rolling Stones song, but nobody is really paying it much attention. They’re all listening to Pitts try different things, the beer cans lining the kitchen floor. “We should start a band.”

“You think so?” Charlie asks, his head leaning up against Knox’s shoulder.

“How would we do that?” Knox asks, the leaping in his stomach nearly deafening. Ever since Woodstock, and whatever conversations he and Charlie had been avoiding, they had somehow snaked themselves closer to each other. Closer proximities with littler words.

“Just start it,” Pitts offers, the unhelpful suggestion sliding in between a riff he’s demonstrating, having ripped it right off of The Who’s *A Quick One* .

“You’re so sexy,” Meeks smiles, and Gerard stops playing just long enough to kiss him.

“I guess we could do that.” Charlie agrees, staring at the two. “You want to write the songs, Knoxie?”

“Uh,” Knox feels himself glup. It had been nice, when Charlie thought he was a Bob Dylan, when he was much more of a lovesick idiot than that. He wasn’t writing prose that would last for generations. He was writing lovesick poetry, no matter how much he wanted to convince himself that he wasn’t.

“I can write some too,” Pitts nodded, fumbling with his guitar strings. The radio played on, and Meeks leaned over to turn it up. He scrambled to his feet, and offered Charlie his hand, bowing obnoxiously as he did so.

“May I have this dance?”

Charlie laughed like a little kid, like the days when they were young and too old to understand that long nights in Meeks and Pitts’ place would end them up together here, years later. Welton had done a toll on them all, but they’d found each other in the place. They loved each other desperately. They always had. They’d kept Charlie from getting expelled for one incident or another, Meeks and Pitts from getting expelled for really only one reason, and Knox from setting anything on fire out of pure spite.

They were a team. A little group of vagabonds. And as Charlie and Meeks danced around their little kitchen, the radio blaring while Knox and Pitts sang along, Pitts trying to keep up on guitar, it seemed like everybody was going to accept the question that had been posed earlier.

“Let’s start a band, baby!” Charlie cheered, frolicking around in the space, the beer sitting warm and lagging in his body.

“You should sing,” Meeks offered, switching arms with Charlie as they jumped around. “And play.”

“Perfect!” He cheered.

“Pitts, baby, you’re on lead.”

“Obviously,” Pitts grinned up at his partner, the look between them filled with enough emotion that even the two who were a little tipsy could feel it. “You’re playing drums.”

“And you’re on bass.” Meeks said to Knox.

“C’mere, Paul!” Charlie cheered, dropping Steven’s arm and extending his arm to Knox, a nod to Knox's favorite bass player. “Dance with me, love!” He supplied in a quite terrible British accent, one that made Pitts laugh so hard he started to cough.

“Dance with me!” Meeks begged, and Pitts put his guitar out of the way carefully before getting up, his hands slotting into just the right places. He was so in love that he couldn’t really understand what he was feeling. Was it the beer? Was it Steven? Was it both that were making him so tipsy?

“Are we starting a band?” Knox asked, because he was a little too tipsy to understand anything. “Like, seriously?”

“Let’s do it!” Charlie cheered.

“Yes!” Meeks agreed, and they did a poor high-five before going back to their partners.

“Are you serious?” Knox finds himself asking, not knowing where it’s come from.

“Yeah,” Charlie nods, so close that he could connect them. “You’ll have to show me that poetry you’re always writing.”

“Maybe,” Knox whispers, wondering if he should close the gap. They keep sending glances to each other’s mouths.

“Getting hot in here!” Pitts laughs, turning around with Meeks a few times. “We’re heading off.”

They all exchanged good nights, and then it was just Knox and Charlie, dancing around in their too small kitchen. Knox broke the tense air between them, sitting next to the radio.

“Do you know anything by heart that you’ve written?” Charlie asks, slinking into the space between them.

“I wrote something earlier.” Knox says, looking at anywhere except Charlie, who he can feel on him.

“What?” Charlie takes a swig of his beer, “You can tell me. I won’t tell a soul.”

“It’s not much. Just a line.”

“I want to hear it.”

“I dreamed all sorts of dreams. Dreams with you in them all the time.” Knox says, and he looks at Charlie. The world crackles around them.

Charlie looks at him, looks at his lips, and takes another drink.

“I should go to bed.” Knox says, not wanting the three little words he’s been thinking about since he was 12 to slip out from his tipsy mouth on the kitchen floor while Bob Dylan plays.

“Yeah,” Charlie nods, but he feels disconnected from himself. He doesn’t trust his word-filled mouth. “Goodnight, Knox.”

“Night, Charlie.”

They sit there a little longer, staring and breathless. They don’t move. They don’t talk. Just sitting there, in that peaceful silence they seem to conjure up around each other. Charlie wants to ask if Knox’s heart is still broken. Knox wants to ask if Charlie could break his. They can’t say any of that, though. They’ll lapse back into their usual selves tomorrow, when the alcohol has worn off and they have a barrier of what’s right and wrong. But tonight, they don’t have any of that; and it’s like they’re 12 years old again. Roommates who can’t stand getting yelled at by their fathers. Beneath the years, they’re still just two little boys who were scared to live without each other. Scared that a word or two or three would change the other’s view on them forever.

Chapter End Notes

> Knox's little poem is actually by Dylan Thomas! one of my fave letters of his recently saw it on Tumblr again and was like ohhhh my god this is the best ever!!!! his stuff is delicious. anyways - hope you guys are enjoying this so far I am sooooo excited about it! :D

met a man who lost his mind

Chapter Summary

1969, 2 weeks and 1 day after Woodstock.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Fuck,” Charlie curses as he walks to the kitchen, the smell of eggs and toast hanging in the air. Pitts is pouring coffee into a mug, and he’s writing something on a notepad.

“Good morning, princess.” Pitts greets, and Charlie fights the urge to roll his eyes. Everything hurts. “I’m making breakfast. Steve can’t stop talking about the band, but I don’t know the first thing about starting one. Maybe we could play at the bar?”

“Yeah,” Charlie nods, pouring a glass of orange juice for himself. “There’s a guy who's a regular there. Cameron. I can ask him if we can play and he can get us into some places. The bar is trying to phase out most live music. Not sure why. But, I think he knows some people in Greenwich. That sort of area. I’ll ask tonight.”

“Ask about what?” Knox asks, yawning as he pads into the kitchen.

“The band,” Pitts nods, turning on the radio. “Since you’re both up, tell Meeks I’ll be home at the usual time. I didn’t want to wake him up today. Too sleepy.”

“How long you working today?” Knox asks, pouring himself some coffee and standing to the side. It's a Friday.

“Probably until like 6. But I might get off early, around 5. Probably not.”

“Cool,” Knox nods, “Well, don’t get your hopes up about the band.”

“Don’t get my hopes down!” Meeks greets, wiping sleep from his eyes. “If you’re out, you’re never getting back in.”

“You’re super serious about this?”

“Totally serious.”

“I think it’s seriously groovy, man.” Charlie grins from ear to ear.

“You would,” Knox laughs out, no malice in the words.

“Ask at work. But I gotta go.” Pitts smooths out his collared shirt, heading out to the bank. Because of their upbringing and Welton and all the years behind them, they all had pretty good, usual, 9 to 5 jobs. College had secured them. They had a nice, large apartment, with three bedrooms and two bathrooms and enough room to host plenty of dinner parties. (Just as long as there were only four people in the kitchen at any given time).

“Cool,” Charlie nodded, pouring himself some coffee. “I’ll ask.” Charlie worked at a different bank normally, but he’d taken up a bartending job as a side gig. Something to make some extra cash, and he liked the work.

“Cameron?” Meeks asked, “He’d be good.”

“Yeah,” He nodded, “He’s over in the Greenwich scene a lot. We can ask him.”

“He’s kind of old, isn’t he?”

“He’s only twenty-eight.”

“Old,” Meeks agreed, pouring himself his own cup of coffee.

“You’re only twenty four.” Pitts kissed him, “See you guys later.”

“Half dead already,” Meeks groaned.

“Shut up,” It’s Charlie turn to grin over at Meeks, who sticks his tongue out in response.

“So early for you two to be arguing already.” Knox laughs, “I have to go get ready for work too.”

“Off at the firm as usual?”

“Every day, Char.”

“At least you didn’t go to law school, Charlie.” Pitts agrees, “See you

all later.”

"At least I'm just a paralegal." Knox laughs.

Meeks follows him for a moment, and Charlie and Knox can hear their hushed whispers of goodbye. It doesn’t take long for Meeks to come back, hopping around as he does so. “So,” He begins, and Knox is glad that work is calling. “Should we write a song today, Charlie?”

“I think so.” He smiles, and Knox is already turning around before either of them can catch him.

Through all the years, despite Knox and Pitts’ own relationships with Charlie and Meeks, they had always been closer to each other. They were best friends before Pitts and Meeks started dating, and they were best friends during and would probably be so for the rest of their lives. Sometimes, Meeks looked at Knox a bit too close. Like he was trying to analyze him. It made his skin crawl, because he knew a drunk confession was sure to have slipped out to him. And if he had said it to Meeks, he was sure that Pitts knew. And that was the vicious cycle. Knox knew that whatever he’d uttered, surely something about Charlie’s eyes or the way Charlie made him feel like his insides were on fire, Meeks wouldn’t say anything. Because that was just how he was. A good friend. A brilliant one, even.

“Maybe we’ll stick to some covers before we try anything crazy.” Charlie laughed, throwing an arm around Meeks’s shoulder. He wants to forget everything that happened the night before. But he can’t stop his eyes from landing on Knox. “I’ll ask at work, then we can make up a game plan.”

“You want to do what, Dalton?” Richard Cameron asks, taking a swig

of his beer. Charlie's bar is one of the few he can frequent where no one is asking him about a record deal, or how to get one, or how Woodstock was to manage. You can't get one if you're no good, he isn't very interested in helping (thanks very much), and it was fucking hell. So, when his favorite bartender possibly in the world asked him about the possibility of his friends starting up a band, he was taken aback.

"Start a band. You would know how to do that."

"Well of course I'd know how to do that." Cameron scoffs, taking another drink. "You either have one or you don't."

"Well, we don't. Not really. Not yet."

"Charlie," Cameron rolls his eyes, but can't help the affectionate laugh that escapes him. For what it's worth, he can't help but be enamored by the guy.

"I know that you're older and wiser-"

"Don't make me sound like I have one foot in the grave. I'm only five years older than you."

"Well, practically dead already." Charlie laughs, shaking up a drink for another customer, temporarily busy with the task at hand.

"I think you're fascinating." Cameron says, because if he didn't know so much about the younger man in front of him, he'd be in love. "So, I'll take a look. Whenever you're ready."

“Well, I don’t know when it will be.”

“Do you need a space to get things together? Practice?”

“Yeah,” Charlie nods, messing with one of his rolled up sleeves.

“We’ll take care of you. Drop by my office when you’re all ready to play together. Anytime. Or if you need something during the day.”

“You don’t have to treat us like royalty or anything like that.” Charlie shakes his head, taking the outstretched business card.

“I don’t take chances. You know that.”

“I know. That’s why I’m worried.”

“Who’s singing?”

“Me,” Charlie says, going back across the bar to help another customer.

Cameron takes a moment to watch him. He’s always been enigmatic, which is what drew Cameron to the place, and what drew him to keep coming back and staying. If Charlie was as good as he said that they could be, and if his friends were anything as lively and wonderful as Charlie was, Cameron felt himself eagerly throw back the rest of his beer. Maybe he’d just found the new Mick Jagger. The new Paul

McCartney. Serving beers right in the upper west side.

“So, are you sure it’s cool with you?”

“More than cool with me.” Cameron nodded, relishing in the grin Charlie was giving him.

“Well, awesome! Thanks so much for everything. Really.” Charlie was grinning wildly, and he didn’t really care if any of the customers asked or the regulars or his co-workers. He knew that Cameron would be a great contact, a great resource. He was someone that Charlie trusted. Someone that could be a great friend, if he ever saw him out of work. He was comfortable around him. So any advice, or anything he could offer to their up and coming (if you could call it that) band was more than great. It was spectacular.

“I’ve got some studio time where I mix on Wednesdays. If you’re all free around 7, I can get you booked in there and we can try some things out. I’ll be free to hear you for as long as you all want.”

“A great offer,” He nodded, the grin spreading wider across his cheeks. “We’ll take it.”

Chapter End Notes

sorry if it is feeling slow paced general hash out of story bleghhhh

let us be lovers, we'll marry our fortunes together

Chapter Summary

1969, Wednesday. First meeting.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So, you four can get started whenever you like. I’ll be here if you want anything recorded or anything else.”

“Great. Thanks!” Charlie nodded, then looked back to the four boys around him.

“You look good.” Knox smiles, wondering if he’s said too much as Charlie sets up, running a hand through his hair. It was getting in his eyes.

“We all do!” Pitts grins, playing different riffs while Charlie gets everything together.

“Hey, we really owe you, man! We can buy you a drink after this!” Meeks grins, speaking into the mic.

“I’ll take you up on that!” Cameron replies, then hits a few buttons in the studio. “Whenever you guys are ready, just go ahead and start. The mics should all be working well.”

“Uh… we don’t have anything original. Not yet, at least.”

“Doesn’t matter. Play The Stones for all I care. Just want to hear what you sound like.”

“Ready?” Pitts asked, standing up to play, adjusting his mic so that he could sing into it.

“Start it up.” Charlie grinned, and they all drove into "I Want To Hold Your Hand." It was short, classic, and would be good as a warm-up. They’d decided so in the ride over in Meeks’s van.

As the chords came together and Charlie started to sing, Knox and Pitts providing the back up, Cameron looked up from his work at hand almost immediately. He was clicking his pen over and over, the rhythm matching up with Meeks’s drums. For not having played ever together (possibly), they were astoundingly, very good. Charlie’s voice was gruff, with a hint of extraordinary clarity to it all. He sounded beautiful, if that was a word he could use. Meeks sounded clear and precise on the drums. Pitts was adding little riffs and letting Charlie do most of the singing, backing him up every once and awhile. Knox was lying down a great bass line, following along carefully. He sang high while Pitts sang low, accompanying Charlie, who was hitting all the right chords. They were making him shine. They were shining together. All too soon, it was over, and they were already moving on. Next up was a Dylan song, one Cameron had never heard anybody try to cover. It was interesting. Pitts had played through what was probably the harmonica parts. It was long, impressively so.

Charlie was still singing, and it had occurred to him only because he had been so caught up in everybody else. There was some sort of lightning between Charlie and Knox, who was his best friend. Cameron didn’t know all that much about Charlie, but he’d mentioned Knox nearly every time they had been together. He loved his friends, greatly. But there was something else happening. The words weren’t his own, but they might as well have been as Knox played, Charlie’s eyes glued to him as he sang the words. *Oh, how can I explain, it’s so hard to get on. And these visions of Johanna, they’ve kept me up past the*

dawn . Cameron wanted to say something, pull them out of whatever haze they'd flown into, but it wasn't going to help.

Pitts was playing out by Meeks, the two smiling and laughing through the work, unaware of the two in front of them, who were staring so intently at each other that Cameron was sure an explosion wouldn't tear them apart. Knox was red in the face, but Charlie was looking at him with intensity. *This is what salvation must be like after a while* , he sang.

The song blew into the wind of the night, and when it was over, Cameron slammed the button down, unsure what was going to come after it. "You guys,"

"What?" Meeks barked, a grin on his face.

"No good?" Charlie asked, finally pulling himself away from Knox. He didn't know what had come over him, and he worried that maybe Cameron wasn't who he thought he was. If he'd been too obvious, was it going to cost them?

"No, it wasn't any good." Cameron stood up, pressing the button again as a grin grew upon his face. "It was fucking brilliant. But I can't sign you if you don't have a name. Or any originals."

"We've got a name!" Pitts said, "Meeks came up with it himself."

"What is it?"

"You want to fucking sign us?"

“I’ll have to get somebody else in to listen. Probably Stick. He’s higher up than me.”

“You want to sign us?” Charlie repeated, awe present in his face. “What?”

“If you can get a single together, we’ll make it happen.”

“We’ll make it happen.” Knox agrees, who Charlie has turned to.

“What’s your name?”

“Letters From The Fight.”

“Long. Artsy.”

“Don’t care.” Meeks says, an act of defiance early on that Cameron can’t help but laugh at. He likes him immediately, even more so. “We love it.”

“Cool.” Cameron agrees, and writes it on the piece of paper he’s done virtually no work on. He’s got a phone call to make. They’ve got to keep on playing. He’s hit a gold mine, he’s sure of it. If he can get Stick to agree, they’ll be off and running. He lets the band play on. He has phone calls to make and people to talk to. Stick is bound to be somewhere close, if not in the building a foot above him.

It takes a moment before he can reach anybody, and even then, it's just Stick's secretary. He doesn't think he's gone home, as Stick normally tells him when he goes. He lives a dangerous life most of the time, screwing the boss and all. But there's nothing really bad about the screwing part. He knows that they're in love. They are in love. So to his secretary, he's screwing the boss. To her, she sounds a bit ridiculous if she brings it up. Stick wears a wedding ring and has a picture of a woman he's never met before in his life on his desk, and Cameron works in the office on the floor beneath. Nothing to see and nothing to report.

The line rang and rang and rang until a familiar voice answered it, a little out of breath. "Sorry," He began, "I didn't hear the phone, and it's long past quitting time. Who is this?"

"It's Cam. I'm downstairs."

"Hello, Cameron. How is that going?"

"Anybody in the office?" He counters.

"No, sorry. Sorry. Habits." Stick releases a breath he didn't know he was holding. "I'm thirty four and you think it'd get easier. How is it going?"

"You should come down here."

"I'm swamped up here. We've got to figure out some fucking way to not break a contract, and my drafts are going horribly. I don't know how to get it right."

“I don’t either.” Cameron answered, that floating feeling he sometimes got when he talked to his partner flying around again. “Uh… do you want to come down here?”

“I will. Sorry. Sorry. I’ll be down in five minutes.”

“See you soon.” Cameron hung up, turning back to the band. His personal life wasn’t perfect, in any possible way, but he had it a little easier than most, he guessed. Stick was in charge of a lot of people, and a lot of acts. Cameron just tried to manage finances and costs of some lower level, new musicians that were signed. He’d been in charge of big events in the past, but he normally stayed out of the spotlight. Just passed stuff off to the next person.

As promised, Stick entered as the band was playing a Simon and Garfunkel song, Charlie and Knox singing together. *I know I’m faking it* , they sang.

“That group’s over.”

“I heard.”

“What else have they played?”

“Some Bob Dylan. The Beatles.”

“They’re done too.”

“Yeah, I know.”

Stick walked up behind the chair Cameron was sitting in, watching the band play. A hand ghosted over Cameron's neck, then sunk back down to his side. Too many people, and Stick couldn't afford to have anybody see him now.

"You said that Charlie's lead?"

"Yep."

"Good looking."

"I think so."

"They're good."

"I want to sign them. I want to be their manager."

"Their manager?" Stick wanted to say something, but he was busy keeping his mouth shut. "You just found them. Are you sure?"

"Wasn't everybody sure when they found The Beatles?"

"I guess."

"I know what I'm doing."

“I know,” Stick took a deep breath. “I just don’t want you to hate it, when it all comes crashing down.”

“It won’t.”

Stick stayed silent, watching the band. He noted Charlie and the bassist’s dynamic, the guitarist and drummer in their own world as well. They all sounded beautiful, and they had a great rapport with each other.

“No originals yet?”

“There will be. They want to be called Letters From The Fight.”

“Long,”

“I told them that.”

“I’ll meet them when they finish this.”

They watched again, silently, as the band finished up.

“I’ve got somebody here to meet you all. Called in a favor.”

Cameron got up from his chair and followed Stick into where the band was playing. They stood a bit apart, keeping their distance. Business

as usual.

“You sound good.”

“Uh, thank you. You’re Stick, right?” Charlie grinned, extending his hand. “Cameron’s told me a lot about you.”

“Has he?”

“He says you’re the best boss in the world.”

“Oh,” Stick relaxed, visibly. “That’s nice.”

“Nice to meet you!” They all started to get up, shaking his hand and saying their own greetings.

“Well, Cameron wants to sign you. Wants to be your manager.”

They all were silent, watching his every move.

“I’d like to let him. He’s a good guy. Good at his job. Handled Woodstock well. As well as he could have. We didn’t know it was going to get out of hand like that.”

“Neither did we.”

“You went?”

“It was the best time of our lives. And the worst.” Pitts finished.

“Since he wants to sign you, I’ll do it. Probably a three record deal, over three years. If you’ve got enough good singles, maybe four or five years. I’ll have to wait to make that call until we see an original. You sound good. I trust Richard. So, there’s no need to worry about being in his hands.”

“Well,” Charlie couldn’t erase his smile. “That’s wonderful. Really.”

“Yes,” He nodded, “I’ll be heading home. Been a long day.”

“See you tomorrow,” Cameron nodded, and then Stick made his exit to the only home he’d ever known. The one he shared with Richard Cameron.

“Fucking awesome,” Charlie said after Stick had left the studio. “Fucking awesome!”

“You guys can stay as much longer as you’d like to tonight. I’ve only got one place to go.”

“Groovy, baby,” Charlie turned back to the band, looking them up and down. “Knoxie, you wanna start up the next one?”

“Sure thing, Char.”

Chapter End Notes

wooooooohooooo happy pride month yayyyyyyy. ps. might not post for a long time coming. have work and life. loveeeeee and peace! xoxo

let your honesty shine

Chapter Summary

1969. Two months later.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So, when we get started on Monday, you’ll have essentially three weeks to record. But if you take longer, that will cost more. If you take less time, great. There’s a lot of stuff going into it all. Cameron should know how to take you through everything.”

“Great! Thanks, Stick!” Charlie grinned, throwing it Meeks’s way.

It had been a whirlwind of two months. There had been photo shoots issued by the company, signing of their contract (which had proved to be four years after their single had come together) and they had eagerly done all of the things needed, going into work the next day as if Stick hadn’t been hyping them up to various places and papers like they were the next big thing. It was exhilarating, no matter how often they were worried or nervous about what was to come of it all.

They were watching as Stick talked on and on about the processes of actually recording an album. They were going to have lots of people coming in and out, managers and business people and people that would be helping them to make their record the best it could be, if they were needed. There was a lot of business talk that none of the four of them really understood quite yet. They were acclimated to a much different area of business, and they weren’t exactly prepared to showcase that side of themselves unless really needed.

“Are you two coming out with us?” Charlie asked, a lull momentarily between Cameron and Stick.

“What?” Stick asked, turning his attention back to Charlie.

“We’re going to a show out in Greenwich tonight, after this meeting. Cameron too. Are you going to be there?”

“No,” Stick shook his head, “I don’t normally go to things like that. I’m sorry.”

“No problem,” Pitts said, taking over for Charlie. “You probably want to get home to your life outside of all of this.”

“See your wife, and everything.” Cameron added.

Stick shifted, looking over at the band. “Yes,” He nodded towards Cameron. “I keep pretty busy with that kind of stuff.”

“That’s nice.” Knox says, “I’m a hopeless romantic myself.”

“ *Knox* ,” Meeks slaps him on the arm, a laugh sputtering out of his mouth that is so genuine and kind that it doesn’t take long until the rest of them are also laughing, enamored by the nature of this little band they’ve found.

“Well, I think we’ve covered just about everything. If we can promote the record well and get some singles to sell well, we’ll probably have a tour lined up for the fall. I know some other bands on our label are planning on touring already. We can probably get you in the opening slot.”

“That’s awesome.” Meeks grins, wide enough that his smile from earlier is still bleeding through. Pitts thinks he looks extra kissable.

“I think you’re going to be brilliant, so a tour should be no problem. That is, if you can put your other jobs on hold, I guess.”

“Fall could prove challenging,” Pitts agreed, “But I’m tired of being a banker, so I think we could make it work. Depending on how it all goes.”

“Of course.”

“Well, I should head out. Get home safe tonight.” Stick turns on his heel, the words he has said pressed over them all, floating directly towards Cameron. No one thinks much of it or pays it any mind as they all scrounge back to their own relationships.

“What are we seeing?”

“There’s a couple folk artists over there that want to make their own label. I figured we’d see them. I think they’re mostly women, but I can’t remember who was on the line-up the last time. I’ve been avoiding things for a few months now.” Cameron explains, closing up the studio they were in and locking up behind the band.

“Any reason for that?” Meeks asked, who gets a thwack to the head from Knox.

“Just had some personal stuff come up.”

“Yeah,” Pitts says noncommiteddly, sharing a look with Meeks, who has turned to Knox as though Knox has poured a pile of hot coals on him. Charlie wonders if hot coals would be a cool line in a song.

“Well, you can follow me up. I assume you’re going to take your van.”

“Everywhere we go!” Meeks cheers, breaking into a run to go and climb inside. Pitts is driving this time, which leaves Charlie and Knox to wait by the side for Pitts to unlock the car.

“I know he’s the boss, but Stick seems depressed.” Knox starts, who is interrupted by Charlie’s own current thought.

“Would hot coals make a cool song title? Or a line, do you think?”

Knox laughs, the sound warm and comforting and like a wonderful warm pool Charlie wants to dive right into. Like soup when he has a cold. Like a hot stream of air in a frigid winter. Comforting.

“I think it could be, yeah. Maybe you could try to write something.”

“Yeah,” Charlie nods, feeling like his stomach is made of molten lava. Molten lava. Hot coals. Boys with big noses. Well, maybe a little too obvious. He could work with it. “Sure.”

He thinks that they should kiss. That they should kiss right here on the street in front of everyone as he can see Charlie’s mind turning with the words he’s playing around with. Knox wants to kiss him so badly it aches.

“Get in, assholes!” Meeks sings, pulling open the door from the inside. “We’re going to Greenwich!”

It’s later, when they’ve all had a beer or four (except Meeks, who is happily the DD of the night) and they’re floating a bit above the Earth that they head home. Pitts takes the front, because he says that the beer is making him queasy, but Charlie is sober enough to know that he just wants to be near Meeks, having been so apart from him all night.

They don’t normally go out much as a group. Charlie will go out with Knox, hitting up bars to dance and flirt mindlessly only to come home together, bone tired. Pitts and Meeks can't go out, and they don't choose to. They are so entrenched in each other; their lives having mingled together for so many years. Charlie was there for Knox’s first heartbreak; (A girl named Chris, who when he showed up at her party, got a black eye for asking her to dance. They never spoke again.) his first love; (A girl named Amber, who was equally as cool and gorgeous as her name suggested. She’d moved away.) his first accomplishments and his big losses and everything in between.

Knox wanted to admit, as he often did when he got drunk, that the way Charlie was looking at him wasn’t enough to make him feel butterflies. He could never be honest with himself it seemed. He’d fallen for Charlie the day of Charlie’s 12th birthday. He had received a phone call from his father; discussing the woes of adulthood that was to come, how he was going to be a really successful lawyer, how he wanted the path he was carving for him to never stray, lest there be any discrepancies in the inheritance. Charlie had cried, because Charlie was emotional, and Charlie was 12, and Charlie didn’t want to be a lawyer like his father.

Knox had seen him cry many times before, they both had seen each

other cry many times. But it was something about this night that was tearing Knox to pieces. Normally, when one of them was in tears like that night, they would have sat on their beds, looking out of their window and talking about it. Maybe trying to imagine what their lives would be like when they were far away from Welton. Some nights it was just too much for them to talk about anything, so they'd settle into bed, crying their tears to the opposite walls. That night had taken everything Knox had thought he knew about the world and thrown it on its axis.

Because in the dark-lit room of their Welton dormitory, on Charlie's 12th birthday, Knox had bridged the gap between their beds. He had expected Charlie to protest, to discourage him from his actions, but nothing came. And as they sank into Charlie's bed, the fit was perfect. They were about the same height, and Charlie pulled himself to Knox's chest, tears pouring onto his school issued shirt. They'd sat there, Knox holding him while he cried. The next morning, they would barely discuss it, and as the years went on and the fit in the twin bed got harder and harder, and Knox got taller and taller, it was awkward some nights. Uncomfortable, even. But it didn't stop them from holding each other if it got too rough.

They hadn't done that in a long time now. Knox wondered if Charlie could hold him like that night when he was 12. Like that night when Knox's heart cracked open like a wave peaking and let Charlie surf right onto it. He had never felt anything like that before, and wasn't sure if he was ever going to again. Charlie meant everything to him and more.

Charlie was feeling hot. The alcohol, the warmth of the night. Knox's eyes so intensely boring into his skull. He felt like turning to him and kissing him just to get his brain to shut up, but he didn't. He wondered if anybody had ever felt like the night when they were 17, sneaking into Pitts's room to surprise him. It was his birthday, after all.

They'd found him kissing Meeks, and it changed Charlie's life, completely. He couldn't remember if they'd shared a bed that night or

not. He was sure to have cried. He wasn't going to die, hopeless and alone. He was going to live, and he was going to love. Meeks and Pitts, from the back, were talking softly to each other in the way that they normally did, hands reaching out and the air around them sweet, like honeysuckles. It never ended and it never faded, that love that they shared.

"I want to fall in love. Properly." Knox said, breaking their own silences. Maybe he was thinking about that night too. About how Meeks had started to cry and Pitts had started to panic and how Knox had just calmed everybody down by saying that he loved his best friends either and any way that he could have them. Charlie found that he was speechless. He had started crying, too. They'd all had little confessions, holding each other tightly. Was he thinking about that too?

"Yeah," Charlie agreed, watching the two most romantic people in the world. "Me too."

"We should try it, sometime."

Charlie couldn't look at him. If he looked, he was going to kiss him. And if he kissed him, the world might stop spinning.

"You two are quiet back there!" PItts laughed, opening the door as the van was parked perfectly outside of their apartment. "First time ever."

"It's great to hear you, Pitts. Really."

"We were eavesdropping." Charlie admits.

“I love you guys,” Meeks says, watching the little group get together before they enter the building. A building that’s far too nice for three drunken fools in love and a sober jester to enter.

They’re too old to start this journey, Pitts thinks. But he doesn’t care. He’s with his best friends and the love of his life. He wraps his arms around everybody, barely reaching Knox as he hums and grins from ear to ear. He’s in love. So, no matter if it all falls apart or not, he’s got these people. He’s had these people. And they’re never going away.

They all finally end up in the apartment, Meeks and Pitts to their bedroom, Charlie to his, Knox to his. They’ve all sobered up a bit, just drunk on the fun and the night and the sticky air.

“You’re thinking about something,” Charlie greets, grabbing the toothpaste from Knox to use himself. It’s been a few minutes and everybody’s getting into bed. They can practically hear the lovers snoring already.

“Yeah,” Knox admits.

“You can tell me, you know. We haven’t been close like we were in months.”

“I know.”

“I miss you.”

“I miss you too, Charlie.”

“Are you in love?”

“What?” Knox feels himself sputter around the paste.

“Your song that we made into the single for Stick. Just wondering, I guess.”

“I’m always in love. A little bit. You know that.”

“Right,” Charlie agrees, although he doesn’t fully believe it.

They finish up, and Charlie stares at him through the glass. It’s Knox who breaks the silence.

“You could tell me. Anything you ever needed to. Whatever you’d have to tell me would never make me be your friend any less.”

“I know.” Charlie says it because he knows it. He knows that they’ve probably been ridiculous and have been wasting years of their lives. But he can’t bring himself to say it to Knox. Because if he says it, it’s real. And if it’s perfect, if it's everything he's ever wanted and more... he doesn't want to ruin that, and he won't let himself.

“I have an idea. But I can’t quite tell you about it just yet. Not for awhile, at least. I’ll know when I'm ready. When you are too.”

“That’s vague as fuck.”

“It’s probably not going to be that important.” Knox laughs, “Remind me tomorrow.” He knows its the alcohol that’s made him say that, although it’s burning away.

“Okay,” Charlie nods, because he doesn’t know why they’re speaking in riddles. They won’t bring this up tomorrow. Just like they haven’t brought up the last few conversations when they get like this. Too much love and not enough courage to put it anywhere.

Chapter End Notes

> okay actually have too much planned had to make the fic longer!!! also im a liar here I am again... whoops!

the time will be our time

Chapter Summary

Knox asks that question.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The album is under way. Or at least, that's what they've heard. Cameron is involved, mixing things and hiring a various slew of people that Charlie can't and doesn't know a single thing about. They're going to events now, too. Photoshoots and things of that sort, which Stick has set up for them. They don't see him much. He's a behind the scenes figure, always there but never really interacting much.

It all feels a bit much, especially to the four, who have things like work to get to during the day. It doesn't matter much to them, as they are excited about the new aspects of their lives, but it's a bit scary at first. The flashing lights, the hair, the makeup. It's a lot, actually, and Meeks has a few moments every now and again where he curls up to Gerard and whispers something along the lines of "Are we sure about this?"

So of course, through all of these new developments, there is a tour planned. It isn't big to start with, as the album isn't quite out yet, but there's a single or two floating through the college campus radio stations. They've gained some traction, and Cameron doesn't take long to decide on taking them through a tour of some colleges in the Northeast. It's an easy pick, and then there's the ultimate hubbub of packing and getting everything ready in the days that follow the news.

"You guys have everything?" Cameron asks, looking around at the group of rag tag musicians, holding their suitcases and their

miscellaneous gear that they do own. Cameron had had some of the people in the office pack up the things they didn't into the van they had rented for their tour. It was very reminiscent of Meeks' own van, and while he had offered that they take his car, Cameron didn't want a law suit out of anything if tragedy were to strike.

"Uh, I think so?" Knox replied, looking wearily between Cameron and the man who was standing next to the van, smoking a cigarette, a coffee in his other hand. Knox could only assume it was black.

"Great. Todd here will be helping you along the way. I'll be following myself in the other van we have here."

"So you'll be our groupie?" Charlie bites, a laugh escaping him that lightens the air around them all.

"You wish," Todd smirks, stomping out the remnants of his cigarette. He brushes his hand through his blond hair, raising an eyebrow at the little band.

"Todd will be your roadie. He's damn good at his job, and there's not much he can't manage. So, I thought he'd be perfect for you all."

"Cool!" Pitts grins, going up to shake the hand that isn't holding the coffee cup like a vice.

They exchange more pleasantries, and then they're packed into the van, driving to a college none of the four have ever heard of. The radio is blaring Bob Dylan, and Todd is tapping on the steering wheel to the words.

“So, Todd, what brings you to this profession?”

“Of groupie or roadie?” Todd fires back to Charlie, who, by Knox’s standards, is already a huge fan of the guy. “Uh, honestly, I don’t really know. I wanted to be a poet. Like Kerouac. Dylan, I guess.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Poems don’t really pay. Besides, I like music. I like your music, specifically.”

“Really?” Meeks grins, a hand slipping onto Gerard’s knee, careful not to show the man driving. They don’t know him well enough yet.

“Of course. Cameron showed me your guys’ stuff and I really love it. Has a real… I don’t know. I can’t explain it.” Todd shifts, like he has something else to say but it doesn’t come out.

“That’s awesome, Todd. Thank you!” Knox smiles from the front where he is also sitting, and then grins back at his friends. Meeks’ hand slips off of Gerard’s leg, and Charlie’s face feels warm from Knox’s smile. He can’t get him out of his head. It’s like a swirling hurricane, like the Charybdis in the Odyssey. He feels like a whirlpool that could swallow anything whole.

He looks at Meeks then, who clearly has seen Todd’s eyes fix onto him and Gerard. He must have caught the knee grab, and although it could have been friendly, Meeks knows that Todd doesn’t think it is.

He shifts, and is suddenly feeling sweaty, although it isn’t hot in the van.

“You don’t have to worry about that with me, you know.” Todd says, not taking his eyes off of the road as he swerves expertly between the last few bits of traffic.

“Hm?” Meeks glups out.

“I tend my own flowers in my garden.”

“Huh?” Knox raises an eyebrow, confused by the whole situation.

“How perfect. If Cameron only knew!” Charlie laughs, boisterous.

“Oh, he does. That’s why I’m on this job, I think. For the most part, at least. He said you two couldn’t keep it in your pants.”

“He’s lying!” Meeks says, although a laugh is beginning to escape him.

“I’m still confused?” Knox looks around desperately.

“I’m gay, Overstreet.”

Knox makes a sound like he understands, and then the van erupts in various ways. Bonding and relationship horror stories and things that band them together in a way that the four had originally bonded with each other in the first place.

Then, they arrive at the hotel. Then, they're split into couples. Todd abandons them with an issue of the Times, and Cameron goes off to his hotel room to make a phone call. Meeks and Pitts unlock their door down the hall, happy and exhausted. Charlie and Knox unlock their own door to find their two beds, sitting pretty in their nice room. It's only for one night.

"Nice place," Charlie mutters, kicking off his shoes and locking up the door behind them.

"Yeah," Knox answers, worried if the close quarters for the rest of the tour will finally do him in. Hook. Line. Sink. He already feels like he's drowning.

"I like Todd." Charlie says, already stripping away his clothes, rifling for a shirt in his suitcase before he sighs and shakes his head, apparently giving up on the journey. Everything feels like static electricity.

"Me too." Knox agrees, and the conversation feels as though they've never met each other in their lives.

They settle around each other, pulling out some things and brushing their teeth, combing fingers through their hair. They've spent time together before, of course, they lived together like this for years. Two beds and barely any space between them. But it hasn't been the same in months, and they both know it. An unspoken thought between them.

It's lights off by the time Knox finally says it, the words having built up for so long and for so many months now that he doesn't know if the ocean between himself and Charlie will ever get closer. "I'm ready to tell you my idea."

“Okay.” Charlie responds immediately. Knox knew he wasn’t asleep, as they’ve known each other too long for him to think something silly like that.

“When was the last time you got laid?”

He hears Charlie choke from the question. “I’m sorry?”

“When was the last time you got laid?”

“Months ago.” Charlie answers, because as much as he likes to brag, it has been months and months and months since he had last gotten laid, the boy looking like someone else if he squinted. He felt sick.

“Me too.” Knox says, knowing his last time was a girl who had a loud mouth and lovely green eyes.

“What are you asking me?” Charlie hasn’t known Knox intimately in months. He remembers what it feels like to sleep with his arms wrapped around him, but they haven’t done that in what feels like years and years. Maybe it has been. He’s losing track.

“It’s our first night of tour, I know, but… well, I don’t know how to say it.”

Charlie sees the world shift on its axis. The light in the bathroom is still on, and he can just barely see Knox in the yellow-orange tinge it’s giving the room.

“I need you to say it before I make a fool of myself.” Charlie’s heart is swelling unnaturally. Knox is going to tell him he loves him.

“I don’t know how to.”

“ *Knox* ,” Charlie pleads. He doesn’t know how to say it? Charlie feels like he says it to him every time he speaks to him. *Great song, Knox. Do you need anything? How did you sleep last night?* I love you I love you I love you.

“I think we should have sex.”

Charlie sputters so hard that he starts coughing. Charlie thinks his skin is on fire. He’s sharing a room, with Knox, on their first tour ever, and Knox is looking at him like he’s found the answer to all his problems. Like whenever they get drunk. Charlie hasn’t had anything yet. He doesn’t know if he has the capacity to.

“I’m sorry. Sorry I said that. You don’t want to. I’m sorry. Sorry. *Sorry* . Forget I said anything.”

“Why?”

“I…”

“Look Knox, I just… it’s our first night.”

“I’m sorry. I forgot about the tour and everything for a minute. Like the groupies and stuff. Don’t worry about it. Forget I said anything.”

“What? I don’t want a groupie, Knox. *What*?” His head is spinning at a very high frequency.

“No groupies?” He asks.

“No!”

“I don’t want any either. To be honest, Charlie, I’d rather have you instead.”

“ *Knox*… ” Charlie feels his heart leaping to his throat, desperate for the talk they’ve been pawing around for what feels like their whole lives.

“Just temporary, if it’s cool with you. Just… if there’s nothing around. All the adrenaline we’re going to have from the shows.” Knox wants to pour it right out onto him. I love you, I love you, I love you. But he knows how dangerous that could be for everyone involved. If Charlie got sick of him, if he didn’t feel the same way. The band would suffer, greatly at that, and Knox knows deep down that he can’t sacrifice the band and everything they’ve been through for one silly little kiss before they’ve even started.

“You’re asking me to be friends with benefits?” Charlie asks, and it comes out much more bitterly than he’d wanted it to. “Why?”

“I just said.”

“No other reason?” Charlie doesn’t want to do that, in any world. He wants to tell Knox how he really feels. How he’s felt since that day when they were 12. But they weren’t ever going to say anything now. They were edging on 25, and once the decade mark had hit, Charlie wasn’t sure he was ever going to have the courage.

Knox was silent, watching. Careful.

“Well,” Charlie stood up from his place where he was perched on his bed, the edge of it nearly already touching Knox’s own bed. Knox almost says aloud how he’s wanted his hands on him since his shirt had fallen from his shoulders.

“Charlie,” Knox says, voice low and arousal clear in his eyes. He wants to reach out, to touch, to try and pull them together before they can ever pull apart. He knows it isn’t right, it isn’t safe. But he can’t care. He’s been dreaming of Charlie Dalton kissing him since he was fifteen.

“You gonna make me wait all day?” Charlie asks, because he thinks if he says anything else, he’s probably going to cry. He’s been wanting this so long, but he wanted it as lovers. As two people who were desperately in love. And he doesn’t know if Knox loves him, and that might be more painful. That will be more painful, in the end. And he knows that, but as Knox’s breath mingles with his own, his rationality flies through the window.

Knox doesn’t waste any time. He’s trying to tell Charlie that he loves him with his lips. He slams against Charlie’s mouth, teeth and tongue and firecrackers exploding and lighting crackling all around them. He’s been dreaming of this since he was 15, and he’s got his tongue in Charlie’s mouth. He lets out a moan soon after, everything too much all at once. He feels like someone has lit his whole body on fire. He’s burning. Charlie lets out a similar noise moments after Knox has, and

then Knox feels better about the whole thing. Like maybe Charlie has been waiting as long for this as he has.

It's later, when Knox is making lewd, luscious, loud noises and the headboard is slamming into the wall that they know they're both in deep to whatever this is. Charlie's just about to see stars, riding the high of the best sex he's ever had in his life, and Knox is trying to pull them together as they both come apart; teeth and lips and hand on the back of Charlie's neck. *I wanna see you, I wanna see you* . It was almost too much for Charlie as the words left Knox's lips.

It's wild, passionate, reckless, and without a doubt, ridden with messy feelings. Knox has been throwing around compliments like he was trying to win a contest. *Baby, oh you're so good, yeah Charlie, yeah baby, perfect.* Charlie hasn't said anything like that. Charlie's been biting off the nagging feeling of wanting to cry by touching every place of Knox and finding what gets him squirming. If Knox knew how in love he really was, he'd probably be asking him to marry him or something equally embarrassing.

"Fuck," Knox breaks their fiery kiss, his bangs plastered to his forehead. "Fuck I want to do this to you. Fuck I feel so fucking good right now, Charlie. Next time let me fuck you."

"Next time?" Charlie's hips still a moment from the offer, "You want to do this again?" He knew that the offer wasn't a one time one, but the fact that he wants to do this again is a little intoxicating. The fact that he wants to do it again is enough to make Charlie grip the sheets a little tighter.

"Fuck yes I want to do this again. Holy shit," Knox is breathing out in little gusts, and Charlie can tell he's close. He is too.

"Well, uh, okay." His words are coming out too chopped, so he has to

lean down to Knox's ear to say them. "I want to find every place that gets you going. I didn't get enough of a chance to tonight."

"Fuck! Charlie," Knox groans, and Charlie knows it's from what he's just said. How they're going to do this again. And again. And again and again and again and again. Until they run themselves ragged with all the love in their hearts.

"Are you gonna cum for me baby?" Charlie whispers, unsure where it came from and why his heart squeezes as he says it. Unsure why he says it in the first place. The self doubt is enough to swallow him whole, but he doesn't have much time to wallow.

Because it doesn't take much else for Knox to finish, shuddering and screaming out his name in such a way that Charlie knows the whole fucking hallway is going to have heard it. Before he can worry about what they're going to tell their bandmates, he sees the things he's done to Knox, the way he's fallen apart at his own hands, and Charlie pulls out quickly, trembling and shaking and cursing over and over again.

When their orgasmic haze finally wears down, Knox is just lying there, looking like he'd taken acid. He was so blissed out Charlie wasn't sure he could move.

"You're not hurt," Charlie finds his voice is still panting, "Are you?" Charlie finds himself panicking. What if he was Knox's first and he hadn't gone slow enough on the prep? What if Knox didn't even like it? His thoughts stop as Knox opens his mouth.

"Probably a little," Knox replies, staring at the ceiling. "Just cause it's been a little while and I got impatient. You're not my first though."

“You weren’t mine either.” Charlie thinks that maybe, in another world, they were. That they were each other’s first, last, and everything in between.

“I could tell from the way you sucked the fucking life out of me. Christ,” Knox looks at him then, the first time he’s seen him since he came down, and the smile he gives him warrants a laugh so wonderful that Charlie leans down to kiss him square on the lips, tangling his hands in Knox’s sweaty hair. Knox breathes him in like air.

“Sorry.” Charlie mutters, pulling away and wiping his chest with the towel he’s gathered, the condom long gone in the trash.

“What are you apologizing for?” Knox asks, letting Charlie clean him up as he lays there. “You just gave me the best head and the best fuck of my entire life.”

I love you, he says. He doesn’t say it. Instead: “I should shower.”

“Let me join you,” Knox sits up, his bones finally working again.

Charlie thinks about asking him. About how friends with benefits is a fuck and leave kind of situation. Not a kiss afterwords, shower together, wash each other’s hair kind of situation. But that’s what it becomes, and Knox is looking at him with those big doe eyes and it’s just one yes after the next.

Knox curls into bed with him, putting his arms around him as they settle into the untouched bed that Charlie had left cold long ago. Knox knows he shouldn’t be doing this. The showering, the way he was massaging Charlie’s scalp. The way he’d called him baby and couldn’t stop saying his name in bed over and over again. The way his arms were snaking around Charlie’s exposed chest. The way Charlie was

letting him. I love you, he says. He doesn't say it. Instead: "Goodnight, Charlie."

"Night, Knox." I love you.

"Are we going to be okay in the morning?" The fear is laced in his voice like lead.

"Yeah," Charlie's voice answers, his brain having short-circuited. No, not really. Not until they talk about it. But maybe they won't. "Friends with benefits. All the after stuff. That counts too, right?"

"Yeah," Knox whispers against his neck. "It does." I love you.

"Okay. Goodnight, Knox." I love you.

"Night, Charlie." I love you.

Chapter End Notes

hey gay people in my computer. long time no write.

morning brings a new day

Chapter Summary

Charlie wakes up in Knox's arms. He's getting deeper.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next morning, Charlie wakes up in Knox's arms. Or Knox wakes up in Charlie's arms. Charlie isn't really sure which is which. Either way, he's awake and Knox is holding onto him carefully, as if Charlie was going to slip away in the night. As if Charlie wouldn't spend forever here, if only Knox would ask him.

Knox wakes up a few moments later, and the room shifts suddenly, threatening to swallow them both whole, spitting them out of the monster's mouth, chewed up and ready for death.

"Good morning," It's the first time Knox has spoken, his voice a bit hoarser than it was yesterday and from the hour.

"Hi," Charlie says, trying hard not to beam. Trying not to let that excitement fall into everything he is. Everything he does.

Knox looks at him as though he wants to say something else. He's looking at him as though he's going to tell him he loves him. He wants to, desperately. It sits on his tongue like peanut butter, thick.

"We should probably go to breakfast, huh?" He says instead, the warmth of Charlie's body against his own suffocating. Enough to drown him whole and never let him up for air again.

“Yeah,” Charlie nods, but his eyes are lingering on Knox’s lips, and Knox isn’t moving. Charlie isn’t moving either, and by the time they both finish the looking and gazing and the longing that they’re engaging in, Knox is leaning in to kiss him.

Charlie thinks of their conversation last night, lets the “all the after stuff counts too, right?” linger in his mind slowly before he’s reciprocating the kiss. It isn’t as harsh or crude or even as searing as last night. It just feels right. Like Charlie has always woken up to Knox giving him a smile and a kiss.

It’s about an hour and a half later when they tumble out to breakfast, thankful that they woke up earlier than normal.

They greet Todd, who is reading a book called *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* . There’s lots of colors and font happening, and it’s truthfully a little jarring to look at. He looks up briefly at them to wave, and sets his coffee cup down on an issue of a Poetry Foundation magazine. It’s this that leads Knox to think maybe Todd is more observant than he’d hoped him to be.

“Good morning,” He says, pulling a chair out to sit with him. He can’t seem to find Meeks or Pitts. Charlie seems to be already engaging with someone they don’t know.

“Morning,” He nods, a pen cap in his mouth as he juggles it all around to pick up his cup of coffee to take a sip.

“How did you sleep?”

“I’m an insomniac, for the most part. I read a bit, wrote some. Didn’t sleep too well, honestly. You?”

“I slept great, yeah.” Knox nods, wishing he’d grabbed a cup of coffee that he could lose himself in. Instead, Charlie is taking forever, and he’s mingling. “You write?”

“Doesn’t everybody these days?” He grins, the pen cap back in his mouth. He’s taking notes in the book, Knox blankly realizes. “I dabble here and there, I’d like to be like Kerouac. Ginsberg. Maybe like Salinger. Melville, if we’re being honest. I don’t know.”

“That’s neat,” Knox nods his head, “Really.”

“Yeah,” Todd nods, back to being engrossed in his book. “I’d probably have to fall in love a little, first, if I were to write something really great, though.”

“Maybe,” Knox says, “But you don’t have to to write great stuff. I’m sure what you have is already great.”

“Your stuff is great. You write a lot of them, right?”

“Yes.”

“Well, there’s our difference.”

“I write music. Not poetry.”

“Music is poetry, Overstreet. You’re in love.”

Knox feels his neck burn red, and before he can say anything more, Charlie is settling down next to him, handing him a cup of coffee and a cheeky grin. He's back to normal, and Knox knows that he must be giving everything away in the second that they've interacted. Before he can feel something that could only be likened to remorse and terror, Meeks and Pitts enter the breakfast area, loud and chattering.

So, Knox forgets the conversation (he tries to) as quickly as Todd goes back to reading his book. They've got a big night, with their first college show and all. They're going to a school that Knox has heard of, but he doesn't know too much about it, or what crowd they'll attract. Other than the obvious studious types.

They won't be covered by anyone important. Maybe the school paper. Which is okay, because Knox isn't sure how tonight is going to go. They've played at a couple of bars in Greenwich, but nothing that was important enough to mention. They've always had some snafu after the other, and he can feel the stress of the situation dancing around in his head.

Cameron meets them a little while after they've finished eating, freshly showered and ready for the day. He's already gone on a run and eaten before anybody else was awake. He is helping them all along, guiding them here and there, explaining that they're going to interview with the college radio station. It all seems easy enough.

"How do I look?" Meeks asks, before they descend from their van into the venue. Todd and Cameron were going to set up while the band was taken by a student to the building that they do the radio program in.

"Just fine," Charlie smiles, because he knows that it will annoy the shit out of Meeks when he says it.

“Gorgeous,” Pitts answers, stealing a moment to place an arm around his shoulder before they’re too conspicuous.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Knox feels warm at the moment, both because of its sweetness and because of the way that the feeling curdles in his stomach. That tenderness. *Music is poetry, Overstreet. You’re in love.* Fuck.

“Earth to Overstreet!” Charlie cheers, snapping in his face to pull him from his stupor.

“Sorry,” He shakes his head. “Sorry.”

“Ready for the interview?”

“I think so. I mean, what are they going to ask us?”

“What your favorite album is, probably.” Meeks says.

“Yeah, easy stuff.” Pitts agrees, turning from the student who is guiding them.

“Probably what our favorite sounds in the world are.” Charlie says.

Knox has an answer to that question that makes him blush so hard he has to focus on the area around his feet.

“Well, here is the building. I will take you inside, and then myself and the club will get you all set up. Thanks so much for coming. We have been loving your single here on campus for awhile now.”

“Thanks!” Charlie grins, because he feels good. Because the student who has been giving them the tour has been giving him googly-eyes since they left the bus. This must have been how rockstars felt. Love for the words you sing. Love for the way you sing them. He lets himself gloat a moment, because he wanted to. Because he could. Because this was the first night in their leg of tour starting up, and he was already falling head over heels back into a pit of despair he’d been trying to climb out of since he was 15 years old.

Knox notes the flirty tone of the girl’s voice, but doesn’t pay her all that much mind. He hasn’t met a woman who isn’t susceptible to Charlie Dalton’s charms. He’s just like them himself.

By the time the concert is over, Charlie is pretty sure that he chose the right time in his life to become a rockstar. He feels good all over, like his heart is going to pump out of its chest. He feels euphoric. He’s helping Pitts load in an amp, and he’s practically flying as he does it.

“Great show, boys.” Cameron grins, the car keys in his palm.

“Excuse me?” A voice calls, and Meeks goes to help Pitts as they see the lanky boy approaching.

“Uh, yes?”

“You guys were great. Just wanted to let you know. I came into town to watch.”

“Thank you,” Charlie smiles at the boy. He’s a little taller than Charlie is, and he’s beautiful. Strikingly so. “Where are you from?”

“All over. I’m a journalist.”

“That’s really groovy, man.” Meeks shakes his hand, and he and Pitts shuffle back into the little area they had the concert in.

“Charlie, did you already pack up your guitar like the way you want it or do you need me to do it?” Todd asks, pulling Charlie’s attention to behind the gorgeous boy who has just told Charlie that his band is good.

“I packed it up already. I’ll grab it.” Charlie replies, reaching out a hand for the boy to shake. “Thanks for coming. We’re all so happy you liked it. Really.”

Todd turns before he can see the boy, and then they’re both inside, packing up his guitar and getting the last few things. By the time they’re back outside, the boy has gone.

Then, they’re plummeting on to the next location, which is only an hour away. A new hotel almost every night. Charlie is ecstatic. Meeks and Pitts are going over every detail of the show, from their outfits to

the details of the people who were in the audience, to the way each note of music that came out of them sounded. They were being analytical, trying to figure out how to wire everything so that the next one could be perfect. Charlie leaned back, listening. He was still running on adrenaline. Knox was looking out of the window, apt in the conversation Pitts and Meeks were having in the front seat.

It's late when they get to the hotel, when they bid their goodnights and shuffle in their bags. When Knox slams Charlie up against the bathroom door in their room with so much force that Charlie actually lets out a grunt. When Knox is kissing Charlie like he's oxygen to his fire. Maybe he is.

Charlie lets himself think that maybe he is as the night gets longer and longer, thinking of the words Knox writes for him to sing. Of the words Knox offers he should sing. The words like "visions kept me up after the dawn" words like "I'll continue to pretend." His mind swirls as Knox kisses him. As he kisses Knox back. He's treading in deep, dangerous water. Water that's full of sharks and monsters and evil spirits.

Chapter End Notes

> thank you guys for the support still on all of this. lots of content coming in the months to follow hopefully as life quiets down for me :-)

can scarcely be controlled

Chapter Summary

The elusive journalist introduces himself.

It's a few weeks later, with a dozen or so college shows under their belt, that Cameron is telling them their album is going to do really well. Extremely well, apparently, according to Stick. Their album is getting lots of hype. Not just from the colleges that they've been playing, but from random articles in various publications, too.

Through all of the new interviews and photographers, there's one that keeps popping up more than the rest. His name is Neil Perry. Charlie is pretty sure he's never seen him before, but he talks about their band like he's talking about something as important as The Rolling Stones. He finds it endlessly flattering. Todd reads his latest article aloud while Pitts takes over on the driving. Their location is only two hours from the last school, but they've all been worried about how much sleep Todd has been getting lately, which doesn't seem like all that much.

"Letters From The Fight are a sight to behold. Their recent tour of Northeast colleges has been something I've had the privilege to follow closely. Charlie Dalton, their frontman, commands the room with an energy of Mick Jagger. David Bowie, even. Their drummer Meeks holds the group together with a rhythm and style that could rival even Ringo. Lead guitarist Gerard Pitts is long, lean, gorgeous, and has a way around the guitar that I have only ever read about in magazines like this. Knox Overstreet, their bassist, has a sweet side to him during shows, reminiscent of whatever I believe Paul Mccartney may be into these days. They are not just good. They're brilliant. With the sex appeal of any big band of the last ten years coupled with lyrics that sound straight from a Dylan track, you are going to want more and more of them. I know I do." Todd finished up, "Then he talks about your single for a while and the upcoming album. Just some dates. Written by Neil Perry."

“That’s a man after my own heart,” Meeks says, because long, lean, and gorgeous is pretty much how he has viewed Pitts since they were eight.

“It’s a pretty good article, for a publication like this.” There’s a photo of a star none of them have heard of on the cover, shirtless and posing in a funny way. Todd flips through the rest of it before deciding that none of it is probably worth his time.

“I wonder if we’ve ever met him,” Charlie says, a piece of gum in his mouth.

“I feel like I’d remember if I met someone that compared me to Paul Mccartney.”

“You would, wouldn’t you?” Charlie bites, and Knox leans over Meeks who is sitting in the middle to swat at him.

“It’s a good article. If he’s a journalist, you’ll probably see him around.” Todd says, tossing the magazine onto the dashboard and going back to his book, which currently is *The Talented Mr. Ripley* . He’s got enough markings in it to write his own novel.

In the van where all the gear is, Cameron is itching for a stop. He’s been desperately lonely these past few weeks. Hardly sleeping, tossing and turning in his bed, the excitement only going long enough to carry him for a few hours. He’s thrilled for the band, really, but he wishes he was home. With Stick. With their complicated, strange, funny little life they led.

So by the time they check into the hotel for the day and he gets everything squared away, he's more than happy to just sit in his own room and talk on the phone for as long as Stick will let him. He has to be careful, of course, because his secretary loves to listen in when he's in the office. But sometimes it's enough to just hear his voice.

"I miss you." He starts, after the phone has only rang three times and Stick can barely get a word out.

"I told you that you weren't going to like tour."

"I didn't think it would be so lonely."

"It is. It'll probably only get worse."

There's a silence that follows, hard and smothering.

"I miss you." Cameron says again.

"I know. I know." Stick huffs, like there's something stuck in his throat. Like he's going to start crying. "I miss you too."

They sit there breathing before Stick says anything else.

"The album is getting released next week. The tour is going to have to cancel the rest of it. We've already got demand for much bigger venues. More expensive ones, too. They'll be living the high life."

“Really?”

“It’s getting likened to a Beatlemania around the office.”

Shit , Cameron thinks. “Well, alright.” He tries to think of something else to say, but he can’t. He just wants to sit in their silence, the comfort of Stick enough to make him ache.

It’s a tennis match of breathing until they say what they mean, and *I love you* hangs in the air all around him as Cameron lies on his bed for a few moments and stares up at the popcorn ceiling. Never really being honest with anyone about his relationship, let alone anyone on tour with him, felt wrong. When Meeks and Pitts were so open about their deep-rooted, intense, passionate affairs. When Knox and Charlie weren’t open about anything but he’d heard them multiple times in their rooms, moaning and panting and the headboard banging loudly enough that Cameron isn’t really positive that they haven’t broken anything. And of course, there’s Todd. Who he met at an underground gay bar and who needed a job so badly Cameron would have been crazy not to take the sweet, charming boy into work with him.

His mind drifts, as it often does, thinking of how unfortunate life could really be. Knox and Charlie were acting as though nothing had ever happened. He saw himself and Stick in them. But they were more passionate in private. He wasn’t sure Knox and Charlie were. Swallowing any more of that self pity, Cameron got off of his bed, ready to set up and get back to work. Anything to take his mind off of Stick and his voice.

It’s even later, after the show, when Meeks and Pitts are making out in the bathroom and Todd is packing away their stuff that Charlie steals a moment in time for the two of them. Todd is bringing out another case to the van, and Charlie slides up to Knox’s ear, licking his lips as

he does so.

Knox stills against him. Charlie's breath ghosts at his ear, and it's enough to make Knox want to pull him into the bathroom and suck the life out of him. "We have a couch tonight." He says, because the couch is new. The couch is big. "We should try it out."

"Excuse me?" The private moment cracked and died, pulling them apart faster than they had wanted. The voice comes from the front door of the little area. Todd has been going in and out of the back one.

"Uh, hi. Yes. Yes?" Charlie feels his reserves crumble as the boy before him speaks. It's the one he met a few weeks ago. The one who was so gorgeous that it took Charlie's breath away.

"I just wanted to say that I think you're fantastic. Really."

"I can't believe you're here again." Charlie tries to bounce back from the capture, but he's not sure he's doing very well. "I've seen you before."

"I've seen you a lot, actually." Knox says, "Are you a big fan?"

"No, I'm trying to be a groupie." The boy laughs, so hard and honest that it brings Charlie to a guffaw as well. "I'm a journalist, really."

"Charlie the van's all done." Todd says, once again not looking too hard at the boy in front of him whose back is turned to him. He passes by them all, looking at the floor, looking anywhere except up. He doesn't want to get involved in whatever fan interaction is going on.

He picks up his little stack of books that he keeps in the dressing room while the show goes on, and then turns on his heel to leave.

"I love that book." The boy says, "*They're a rotten crowd. You're worth the whole damn bunch put together.*"

It's then that Todd looks up at him. Knox and Charlie see the way that the two have the air kicked out of their lungs. They look as though they're seeing a great wonder of the world for the first time.

"Uh, um. Y-yeah. Yeah. Gatsby is good. I've read it like five times." Todd is desperately trying to make conversation. He seems nervous, and there's a stutter that happens when he speaks.

"Me too!" The boy grins, and Knox is fairly sure Todd has just fallen in love.

Any further conversation is halted by the long, loud moan that comes out from behind the bathroom's door.

"Show business!" Charlie says, and Knox pounds on the door a few times.

"There's somebody in here!"

The boy doesn't pay much mind to that situation but instead introduces himself as Neil Perry. He's about their age. He's gorgeous; a handsome man who looks as though he belongs in a film, like the ones that Jimmy Stewart is in. He tells them he's an actor, but he recently got into music journalism. He finds it more fulfilling than his shitty waitering jobs when he's waiting for another opportunity.

“Sorry, jeez. Can’t a boy have some fun?” Meeks asks, his glasses askew and his hair all mussed up as he exits the bathroom. Gerard looks like he’s in an even worse state.

“Nice to meet you!” The boy says, and then Charlie’s stomach curdles. Neil Perry knows, now. What so many of them are.

“Uh, hi?” Meeks nods his way, his lips red. His neck bruising.

“I’m Neil Perry. I’ve been covering you guys for magazines.”

“Are you going to write a story about this?” Knox asks, the words leaving his mouth so quickly that only Charlie and Todd really process them.

“The concert? Of course. I wanted to just introduce myself. I’ve been in talks with Stick, from your record company. He wants me to follow you on your next tour. I’m getting promoted at work, I think.”

“What parts of the concert are you going to cover?” Charlie asks, because he isn’t sure if he trusts this journalist to end them before they begin. He isn’t sure he wants all of America to see that Meeks and Pitts spend more time together than apart.

“The music. I’m not sure what you’re saying.”

"Really?" Charlie challenges.

“Sorry.” He shakes his head, his cheeks turning a bright color. “I wouldn’t…” He looks at Meeks and Pitts, who shuffle further apart. The distance is breaking them in two. It hurts him, deeply. “I know what that’s like. So of course I wouldn’t publish it.” He says it gravely, and Knox is pretty sure Todd is done for.

“Thank you.” Charlie says, the relief flooding his voice.

They all mingle a bit more, Meeks and Pitts eager to get back to the hotel. Charlie and Knox are eager to as well, to break into the couch, but they’re all cognizant of how Todd is reacting to the boy, how he is reacting back. The firstness of it all. It’s heartwarming, and as they pack up and Todd waves him a goodbye, it’s enough to propel them all into feeling good for at least the next week.

something about you

Chapter Summary

> It's some few weeks further into the whole post Woodstock, band starting scandal. Almost 1970.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The couch had worked. All those weeks ago. And the bed. And the twin bed. And the bed in Charlie's room in their own apartment. And their kitchen counter. And the bathroom at the recording studio. And the bedroom on their new tour. And the table from their last hotel during the new tour too.

"Hey, Knox?" Todd begins, sticking his head in the bathroom that the entire band is sharing when he finds them kissing. They fly apart immediately, like they've been burned.

"Uh, yeah? Yes?" Knox says, fiddling with his blazer and messing with his hair. His hands are hot from being underneath Charlie's shirt. Charlie's got a hickey forming.

"I was just wondering if you all were ready to go."

"Don't tell anybody about this." Charlie says, his breathing labored. "Don't."

"This isn't any of my business, Charlie." Todd is a bit taken back by Charlie's tone. "You know I won't." Todd shakes his head, as if he's baffled Charlie would even have to ask that of him. "We're going back to the hotel for the night."

“Right,” Charlie nods. “They’re having a party for us. Or something.”

“Yeah,” Todd nods. It’s probably going to be… a lot different than what you’re used to. Now that we’ve got a bunch of new people on the tour.”

“We’ll be out in a minute.”

Todd leaves them be, and then Knox turns to him, terror in his eyes. “I’m sorry,” He says. “I’m so sorry.”

“Why are you apologizing?” Charlie cocks his head, looking in the mirror at his undone tie. He fiddles with it, taking it off. “I’m in this with you.” I love you. “We decided this. Together.”

“But it was my idea.” Knox rambles off, fixing his mussed hair, rebuttoning his shirt.

“I know. But we decided it together.” Charlie says, fighting every urge to say anything more. Anything that would give away his whole soul.

“This party… should we trying something different tonight? I think Cameron knows about this too.” Knox is looking at his feet, like he’s wanting the answer Charlie is going to say, but that maybe something should happen to where they break apart; even if only for the night.

“We can try. If that’s what you want.”

“It’s a friends with benefits, right? We don’t have any attached

feelings.” Knox’s throat is tight enough to close for good and never reopen.

Charlie doesn’t answer that. He instead turns Knox towards him, finishing the buttons for him. They’re very silent after. Quick glances and steps around the other.

They get back to the tour bus (because they have gobs of money now, and they don’t know what to do with it). They are sitting together, greeting Meeks and Pitts and the other roadies they have and Todd, who is sitting in the back, reading. A lot has changed in the last few months, but Todd has remained one of the only constants in their lives.

They arrive at the hotel soon after. They’re greeted by flashing cameras, fans screaming at them, and a party inside that is so full of people that Charlie has only read about this sort of thing in magazines. There’s girls everywhere, and there’s enough alcohol to feed an army. Cameron had mentioned briefly that sometimes these sorts of things got set up, depending on where they were.

Charlie gets to the breast of it all. Drinking. Mingling. Kissing people in the bathroom. He has to get Knox out of his fucking head. This whole situation with him has been making him spiral. He’s singing lyrics Knox is bringing in about being held, about remorse, about fate. It’s suffocating him. He feels like he can’t keep up with the tides.

“You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” The girl he’s kissing says, and he supposes he has. He supposes the ghost is himself.

He spots Knox across the conference room that’s been turned into their party place, one of the new roadies talking to him closely, like Charlie gets to. Like Charlie wants to. Like they do when they curl around each other at night. The girl in front of him won’t stop kissing

him. He just lets her. When Knox takes a drag of the roadie's cigarette, Charlie follows her up to her room in the hotel, choking on the stifling air around him.

She's gotten as far as taking his shirt off when Charlie starts to think more clearly. "Hey, stop. Stop." He says to her, and it takes her a bit too long to get off of him after he says it.

"Hm?" She asks, because he can tell how badly she wants him.

"I can't do this. Sorry," He says, and gets off of her. He leaves without another word. He's stumbling back down to the party, but he runs into Todd and Neil getting off of the elevator.

"Fucking gorgeous words," Neil is saying, his mouth on Todd's neck.

"Agh!" Todd exclaims as the elevator reveals Charlie. They are both very visibly drunk.

"Uh…" Charlie finds he's stammering. Why can't it be fucking easy for him like it is for everyone else? "Secret's safe with me."

"Why would I want to keep this a secret?" Neil asks, his camera around his neck and a small notebook in his breast pocket. "Look at this guy." He showcases Todd a moment as they leave the space for Charlie to climb aboard. "He's fucking beautiful."

Todd laughs so brightly that Charlie wonders if he's never been this drunk before. "Neil, stop!" But his hand is threaded into Neil's button up, his fingers playing a rhythm against him.

“I don’t think I can. Todd Anderson! Todd Anderson!” Neil is cheering, and Charlie quickly pushes the down button so he can escape from all of it.

Back down at the party, he doesn’t find Knox. The room is empty without him, even if there’s throades of people in it. Cameron is nowhere to be found either, and Meeks and Pitts had left the madness nearly as quickly as they’d gotten inside, desperate for some time alone.

Charlie doesn’t want to go back to his room. He doesn’t want to go to a place where Knox isn’t going to sleep anymore. They had been booked into adjoining rooms this time, a king bed for each with a bathroom between. It broke Charlie’s heart. It would break his heart even more if he came back to Knox moaning against someone who wasn’t himself on the other side of his wall.

Swallowing the hot, jealous rage inside of him, Charlie trudged back to the elevator, riding it until he got off on his floor. Knox’s room was before his own, and he couldn’t hear anything. At least Knox had the decency to fuck the roadie in a place Charlie couldn’t hear.

He was being fucking ridiculous. He is being ridiculous. He knows he is. But his mind is just full of thoughts that are Knox, Knox, Knox. He trudges into the room and throws the key on the desk, shredding off his white button up that they wear for the shows. His blazer is long gone, and then he runs a hand through his hair that is still sweaty from the show.

He doesn’t bother to knock as he opens the bathroom door. When he opens the door to find Knox hunched over the sink, he feels like he’s going to throw up. “Open the door, dickhead!” There’s another voice on the side of the door that Charlie hadn’t heard from the remorseful walk he’d done into their adjoining rooms. He felt that rage again.

White hot.

“Knox?”

“Charlie just go back into your room, alright?” Knox was shaking his head, but it was doing nothing for Charlie's well-being.

“What's going on in here?”

The roadie from earlier’s voice comes again, a pounding on the door. "Knox!"

“He tried to fuck me. I didn’t want him to."

"What?"

"It got a little heated after I said that I didn't want him anymore.”

“This is your idea of trying something different?” Charlie's rage is more than apparent. He was furious. With the situation, and with Knox thinking that this asshole was going to be good enough for him. As if he didn't deserve everything that was fine in life.

"I don't know, okay?" Knox huffs, but Charlie can see the fear in his face.

"Knox,"

“I was going to, yeah.”

“But you didn’t?”

“I don’t want to. I’ve got too much on my mind.” Knox flips so he’s leaning against the sink. His hair is messed up and his lips are swollen. Foolishly, Charlie wants to kiss them.

“How did it go with that girl you were talking to?”

“I told her to stop too.”

That hangs in the air, vibrating with electricity. What the implications of it all could be. What they probably are. Charlie almost lets himself say I love you before he looks at him again.

“I’ll take care of him.”

“Okay,” Knox agrees, because Charlie has always been the stronger of the two.

“Hey, asshole!” There’s a few heated words exchanged and a threat to be fired. A threat that sounds empty to the roadie, but what Knox knows is true. They’ll never see him again, and they’ve only done three cities on their national tour so far. Knox hears his door close and his hands finally stop shaking.

Knox pounces on him when Charlie comes back into the bathroom. They're both gross from the show still. Knox mumbles that they should fuck in the shower. Knox is desperate to pull them closer together. It doesn't feel right to Charlie, though.

"Hey, hey," Charlie says against his lips, "Hey, stop it. We should talk. We should talk."

"Hm?"

"We should talk about what just happened. Are you okay?" Charlie's holding Knox's face in his hands. *I love you.*

"It just got dicey after I said I didn't want to have sex. I locked myself in the bathroom cause he got a little testy."

"And I was upstairs with a girl I didn't want to sleep with," Charlie shakes his head, blowing a stream of air through his lips. "I should have been here the whole time."

"It's okay. I'm fine."

"Somebody could have taken advantage of you. It wouldn't have been fine, Knox."

"Charlie," Knox remembers then, that between all of their passionate sex they've been having, that they still don't know each other as well as they once did. They pretend to do so now, but there's still that gap between them. "I've taken care of myself just fine in similar situations before."

"What?" Charlie stills against him, so much that Knox worries Charlie won't want him anymore.

“Yeah,” Knox kisses him, square, on the lips. “That's all over now. I don’t want anybody but you anyways.” *I love you.*

“Are you okay?” *I love you.*

“Just a little shaken up. Stuff like that... it's nothing I can’t handle.” Knox says, but the answer he knows, is not convincing enough to Charlie.

“You don't have to lie to me.”

“Yeah,” Knox nods, and Charlie kisses him softly on the cheeks. His forehead. He moves to turn the shower on, careful with him. Tender.

His hands are back on Knox, exploring. He’s still finding himself caught up by every inch of him. Knox unbuttons his shirt, and Charlie does the rest for him. He lets his mouth linger on Knox’s collarbone, where various hickies Charlie has given him are on display.

“What is it?” Knox whispers, as Charlie’s mouth ghosts over the area.

“Just thinking.”

“About?”

“You.”

“Yeah,” Knox leads them into the shower, "I'm fine."

"That won't stop me from thinking about you."

"I've been thinking about you since I was like twelve.”

Charlie kisses him with new vigor from that confession, because he isn’t sure they can really get into the thick of that tonight. Besides, they’re sobering up, but they’re still tipsy enough for everything to spin a little.

They’re like a cycle. Back together, they both know where they want their hands, where they like to be touched. Where they like to fall asleep together. Knox calls him baby and Charlie says his name like he’s invented it and they wake up the next morning with only a bit of a headache.

They roll around each other and kiss a little longer than they normally do before they get out of bed, throwing on some clothes to travel in and packing up the rest of their rooms. They float down to breakfast and find Todd, who is writing furiously in a little notebook that he always has on him. He’s got a hickey on his neck and a hand in his blond hair.

“You seen Cameron?” Charlie asks him, while Knox goes to get them cups of coffee.

“He was on the payphone out front.” Todd answers, not bothering to look up from his scribbles.

“How was your night, gorgeous?” Neil asks Knox as he gets the coffee, a smile on his face.

“Uh, it kind of sucked, at first.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I saw you with that one guy from the show.”

“Yeah,” Knox nods, “It was pretty shit.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I had a better night towards the end.”

“Well, that’s good.” Knox hasn’t yet broken into a friendship with Neil. He knows Charlie has, and could tell from the moment that they all started hanging out together that they would get along from their personalities alone. “I had a great night myself.”

“I’m happy to hear that.” He smiles, and follows Charlie’s movements to the front of the hotel as he juggles the coffee between his hands. There’s still some fans lingering around, but they all look too tired to engage him in any conversations. Besides, he’s not Charlie, and most of them want him anyways.

Cameron comes out from the front area of the hotel with Charlie hot on his heels, a passion in his steps.

“Charlie told me about last night.” He says, a newspaper under his arm. “We’re sending Tony away.”

“Oh,” Knox says, because Charlie looks like he’s seen a ghost and Cameron looks mad enough to do something crazy.

Knox looks at Charlie as Cameron breezes past them, and hands him his coffee.

“Are you okay?” Charlie asks him. He's been careful with him ever since Knox's half confession. He doesn't know if there will ever be a whole one.

“I’m fine, yeah.”

I love you.

I love you too.

“Alright. We should get packed up for the next city.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you all are enjoying. sending my love <3

if you want me to, i'll lie

Chapter Summary

Few weeks before 1970.

It's another three months of intermittent self-imposed torture before they decide to take a break. They've been doing concerts the entire holiday season, a day off here or there. Knox flies to Charlie's home for Thanksgiving and they sneak around in his big house and find ways to get each other off, even with the looming fear of Charlie's terrifying father.

But it's that space in time before they ring in the new year and after Christmas that they decide something has to change. They're in Dayton, OH after a concert that the crowd was so vivid at that they're all seeing stars afterwords when Meeks walks in on Knox giving Charlie a blowjob in the green room bathroom. They had stopped any fooling around since the Todd incident in public, figuring that other people wouldn't be as chill to the story as their beloved roadie had been. They hadn't even packed any of the gear before Knox had thrown him into the stall at the end, saying something along the lines of "If you don't stop flirting with me on stage I'm going to have a heart attack."

But of course, because they're a bit focused on the task at hand and Meeks was merely checking to make sure the band hadn't left any personal items in the bathroom, the unlocked door to the stall hung open like a gate. Neither of them see him at first, Knox too focused on the task at hand and Charlie too focused on threading his hands through Knox's sweaty hair, mumbling stuff about how good his mouth is.

"You guys," Meeks says, and when neither of them pay him any mind, he says it again. "You guys."

Charlie sees him first, shock and panic and terror crystal clear on his face. Knox pulls off in a second; a choking sound following it, and then they're both fixing Charlie back up, buttoning his shirt and adjusting his jeans.

"What the fuck is going on in here?" Pitts asks, threading his own head into the space of the door. He sees that they're both sweaty, a bit disheveled. He'd have to be blind not to see what's going on. Knox feels his face heat up with embarrassment. Charlie feels his neck heat up with fear.

"Nothing," Charlie assures, like Meeks hadn't just seen his whole dick and like he hadn't probably seen how deeply, hungrily in love with Knox he was.

"Charlie?" Meeks looks like he's going to ask the question that neither of them are ready to answer.

"We should be heading to that after party at the hotel anyways." Knox says, as though he's trying to save them all. "Be a long night."

"Knox," Meeks shakes his head, a defeated tone in his voice. Like he isn't surprised by it. Like it's exhausting him.

Neither of the long in love couple gets an answer from either of them as Charlie and Knox get out to leave, washing their hands, hardly looking at each other and barely making conversation. It's an hour load-in for all of their new gear to their new tour bus and they all change into their after-party clothes, provided by their new dresser, who is surely going to be somewhere at the party. The image is new too. It's no longer button ups, blazers. It's all tighter now. Sexier. Charlie wonders if the lights were hitting him differently tonight for Knox to get so worked up. Especially after they agreed two weeks ago to try to stop.

The party isn't anything like the ones that they started with. Now, there's lights everywhere. People with cameras in every corner. No alone time and the alcohol burns through everyone so quickly that everybody's moved to something a little harder. Charlie arrives with his usual sort of grandiose applause that seems to follow him wherever they go. The public is wild for him.

They all split ways. Todd goes to chat with some of the other roadies, since he has been around the longest, and they all seem to respect him for it. Neil goes off to talk articles, and likely boast about the great behind-the-scenes footage he gets, since the band has practically welcomed him as their own. His photograph of them all, lying in a Welton dormitory bedroom, will be gracing the cover of The Rolling Stones in two months time along with their first featured article, which is written by him as well.

Meeks and Pitts split to get drinks, keep up appearances for an hour or so, and leave their separate ways, only to reunite as the hours grow longer. Knox follows Todd to the roadies, because surely one of them will want to have him tonight, and he can't keep having Charlie. It's hurting so badly that he doesn't know why they do it anymore to begin with. He's been trying to convince himself that he isn't in love with Charlie, and Charlie isn't in love with him. It's so hard that Knox isn't sure he'll ever really get over him. If he ever can. What a stupid fucking idea he had all that time ago.

Charlie goes over to the group of girls that could only be really known as groupies, taking his survey of the lot after he takes a drink, snorts something with one of their roadies Peter, and heads back to the girls. The one he chooses is pretty enough. Sweet enough. Enough to hopefully make him forget about Knox for a few hours. A few cities ago, he'd fucked a girl from a local bar, only to call her the wrong name in bed. He was still being haunted by that.

They've gotten dangerous, now. Charlie can't sleep without Knox by his side. He's singing the lyrics that Knox is bringing in, and they're

new. They're about love. Each one of them. Even if he's never said it, even if he doesn't describe it that way to the critics and the interviewers. Charlie knows that they're about love. Knows that they must be about the two of them, because who else would Knox be doing to write words like *you know all the parts of me better than I do.*

So, Charlie kisses the girl in front of him after a few more drinks and dances with her and laughs in all the right places and smiles for the few photographers and hopes that they capture him kissing this girl, because he wants people to think he's available and easy and open. He wants his father to see a tabloid with some nasty, filthy rumor that he's sleeping with every girl he sees plastered on the cover.

Knox is in the bathroom again, out of any photographer's eyes, but this time the roles are reversed. It's good, sure, but it isn't what he's used to anymore. And why is he used to it? The guy on his knees isn't Charlie, and it feels dirtier than it should, all of a sudden. Knox has tried to forget him. With guys who come to the shows, who just want him to talk to them about his music. With girls who come to the shows to flirt. He never came out to anybody officially, and supposes he doesn't need to now, with the activities he's engaging in. He thinks of Charlie's mouth, and leans into the touch.

It's later, when Charlie's left the groupie he just fucked in the bathroom and taken another pill from one of the roadies that always seems to have things when he finds Knox, who looks sweatier than the last time they had met up. They're both grabbing beers, and Knox is trying in vain to light a cigarette. His hands are shaking. The cocktail of things he's had is making Charlie more confident, if in a dangerous sort of way. Knox is talking to one of the roadies Todd likes, and they're talking about guitar. Who plays the best, who has the best music. They're talking about George Harrison, Jimi Hendrix. Neil Young. The guy excuses himself when Charlie comes around, and before either of them can say anything to the other, Meeks slots in the place he's left.

"I'm sorry I walked in on you guys." He says, and although it isn't the right place to have the conversation, it seems that they're having it

anyways.

Charlie and Knox barely talk about what they do after they've done it. Certainly not with their best friends, either. They can barely talk about their own feelings, so if Meeks thinks he's going to get anything out of them, no matter how drunk or sober they are, he's in for an empty conversation.

"It's not a big deal," Knox shrugs, his shaking hands still trying to light the cigarette.

"We've been hearing you guys for weeks. Why didn't you tell us you were dating? I thought you two were-"

"We're not," Knox shakes his head, cutting him off immediately. He can't get the cigarette to light.

"Sorry if we've been loud." Charlie says, shame and embarrassment covering his neck in the color red. "C'mere," He holds out his lighter, lighting his own cigarette, then using his own lit one to light Knox's. It's the most intimate of gestures they can do in such an open space. Knox's eyes trail over Charlie's lips, hungry. Knox only smokes when he's been drinking.

"But-"

"Don't look into it too far, Stevie. Okay?" Charlie snaps, because he doesn't want to talk about it with anyone, let alone Steven. Even if he's his oldest friend.

Steven looks at them, and Charlie knows that he thinks they're being

ridiculous. Charlie knows they're being ridiculous. Knox had all but moaned that he'd loved him two weeks ago. *You keep fucking me like that and I'm gonna go and fall in love with you.* They were drunk, so the words were garbled. He almost was sure he'd dreamed them. They weren't going to discuss it. Charlie pops a pill from his pocket, something a roadie gave him. He washes it down with the lukewarm beer he's drinking and turns towards Knox after Meeks has gone away.

"I've gotta finish what I started," Knox says, his hand reaching into the pocket Charlie has fished in, only to pull out nothing. He instead drums a pattern with his fingers, quick enough to almost miss it. Knox says that instead of I love you. Instead of how they should be more careful. Instead of how this isn't going to work in the long run. Instead of how he's missed him.

"You don't want to go apart tonight?" Charlie asks, because of course he wants to sleep with Knox. He misses him. He knows and doesn't care whether he's the first of the night or the last.

"I already did." Knox answers, the smoke curling around his face. "Bathroom."

"Oh."

"You did too. I know you did."

"Yeah."

They take that in. The jealousy they're both feeling, but not saying anything about it. They know it's at the surface, pawing to be let free from its cage. Instead, in a turn of events, Knox leans towards his ear, whispering. "Hope you said the right name this time."

Charlie pales as Knox backs away to a safer distance. He hadn't mentioned that to Knox. He knows he hasn't. But everything after Knox had all but said he loved him two weeks ago was a blur. Maybe he'd gotten too caught up in the heat of the moment. He wants to ask, but his throat is dry.

"So now what?" He asks instead, because he isn't sure where this is going anymore.

"You know I want to sleep with you, Charlie. All the fucking time. It's been two weeks, and I can't stop fucking thinking about you."

Charlie's rendered speechless again, a task he once thought impossible.

They leave together soon after that, and for once, no one bothers to say goodbye to them. It's refreshing. They stay a good distance apart in the elevator, lucky to have been booked on the same floor. Charlie's room is second. Knox's room is first. The days of adjoining bathrooms and separate twin beds are long over. By the time Charlie's pressed against the door of Knox's hotel room, he forgets that he's even in pain from all of his crazy feelings towards the boy kissing him. Knox has his mouth everywhere, and he's muttering words that sound like love. The pill Charlie's taken is making him feel relaxed, and it's probably the only thing keeping him from gripping Knox's gorgeous face in his hands and screaming out the three words.

It's even later, when Knox is pounding into him and touching him all over and kissing his neck that Charlie thinks he should say it tonight. Swallow all his pride, live with the guilt if it isn't reciprocated and the nightmare that this has been an elaborate dream he's engineered in his own mind. That's stopped by Knox biting his ear, tender and sweet and saying, "Charlie, you're my best friend in the whole world. The only person I'd ever trust to love me as good as you do."

And, fuck. Charlie's reserves crumble down to nothing again. He'll do anything to keep running his heart ragged like this. He doesn't want Knox's hands to ever get off of him. He doesn't ever want to exist in a world where Knox doesn't look at him like he's looking at him right now.

It's later, when Knox is cleaning them up and they're slipping under the bed sheets that he hardens against Charlie's touch. A first.

"Sorry," Knox whispers, and Charlie can't see his face but he's pretty sure he's terrified. It's the same voice he had when Meeks caught them earlier.

"For what?" Charlie's coming down from his high, and he's tracing his fingers up and down Knox's back. He's seeing galaxies.

"For what I said."

Charlie doesn't answer that. He isn't sorry. He's in love.

"Heat of the moment," Knox covers, "You know."

Charlie knows he's treading into dangerous waters, but takes the plunge either way. "But you're my best friend in the whole world, too. The only person who has ever loved me as good as you do." He repeats Knox's own words, and Knox flips so he's facing him.

"*Charlie*," Knox warbles his name, touches his face, and Charlie closes his eyes. It's too much. They're in too deep. Knox feels his eyes well

with tears. He wants to say it so badly, but the alcohol and the timing and whatever Charlie's been taking are all red stoplights, pulling them apart. *I love you.* "We should head to bed." *I love you.*

"Yeah," Charlie nods, threading their fingers together and pulling him so close that he's lying on his chest. *I love you.*

They sit in silence for a moment, but Charlie can hear Knox's strained voice saying the next part of his own confession. "I can't keep doing this anymore. I thought I could do it again. But I can't. For awhile, at least. It hurts too badly."

"Me too." Charlie agrees, because he does. Because he doesn't want to do this anymore if they're still too afraid of fucking it all up by saying the three little words. And not only that, but they're different people now than they were when they started after Woodstock. It's been too fast, almost. Charlie wonders if Knox can feel his tears on his chest.

"Good night." Knox's fingers pull him impossibly closer. *I love you.*

"Good night." *I love you.*

the feeling shared between us

Chapter Summary

1970. Happy New Year.

They're on a break from touring. Which is good. A break from each other. Knox and Charlie moved out of the apartment a few months ago, when checks started coming in, and they're finally alone, the new year ringing in around them. Meeks and Pitts are together, flicking through bad magazines that they're posing in, looking at the ones they look good in. Or that the articles are good.

They're cuddled together, not worried about wasting any time but their own. They want to just lie around for a week, ringing in the new year with only the television set and maybe the sounds of their neighbors.

Meeks is lying in Gerard's lap, handing a joint back and forth. "You think they're done?" He asks, and he doesn't have to say who he's speaking about because he knows Gerard will know immediately.

"I don't get it, honestly."

"Me either."

"I thought you said they weren't dating."

"They aren't," Meeks shakes his head, "I walked in on them, but that's all I've seen. Or heard about, really. Charlie told me a few years ago that he had feelings for him, but I thought maybe he got over it. Honestly."

“It makes no sense. I just… I don’t get it.”

“Me either.” Meeks sighs, pushing their magazines out of the way so they can properly watch the newscast. Or at least, so he can settle into Pitts’s lap as they watch it. He’s more than ready for the new year. He needs it to happen, and fast.

“I love you.” Gerard says, putting out the remnants of their joint in their ashtray that’s on their bedside table. Everything that they own together.

“I love you too. Always.”

“Always.”

They settle back into their bed, watching the television lazily. It’s nice, for once, to just sit in silence with the person you love and not have to answer to anybody or anything about anything. They had taken the phone off of its hook, which only added to their domestic peace. One night without interruptions from anybody. Peace at last.

Across town, Cameron had finally finished up an interview for a local radio station and was heading back home, the cab going slowly due to the crowds that always went along with ringing in the new year. He was eager to get home, as it was the one time he wasn’t going to be bombarded by people, or by work.

Ever since he’d become the manager to Letters From The Fight, he had been in more public eye than he ever thought possible. He was everywhere, it seemed. He was photographed, interviewed, and asked just about every question known to man. The questions were never

very personal, but it felt just invasive enough for them to bother him.

Eventually, he gets home, and once he opens the door, he finds it pretty quiet inside. Their cat, Buttons, greets him, and the television is playing a newscast for the year. “I’m home!”

Their apartment is huge. It had been before they had embarked in the newest American band that was the hottest commodity of the last few years. It would be huge after. He finds Stick on the couch, half asleep.

“Hi,” Cameron smiles, warm. He loves it like this. Where it’s just himself and Stick against it all. In their own little world. He had been so lonely on the tour.

“Hi,” Stick grins back, and makes room for him on the couch, threading himself around his partner.

“It went well.”

“Good. I knew it would.”

They don’t say anything else, content to just lie in their own private world. It’s peaceful. Until the phone rings sometime after the ball has dropped and they’re both awoken from the sound. Cameron doesn’t know what time it is, but he shuffles to the phone anyways, always the businessman. They have two separate lines in the apartment. Not many people call them at home, so it is a strange coincidence for them both to be home and only one phone to be ringing.

He answers in a state of exhaustion. Stick groans that the couch has hurt his back, that once the call is over he’ll be waiting in bed for

him.

“Is this Cam?” The voice on the other end is Knox’s, and it sounds like he’s been crying. There's lots of noise happening behind him.

“Knox?” The question hangs in the air long enough for Stick to stop in his tracks. “What’s the matter?”

“I’m drunk. I’m really drunk. What’s your address?”

“What?”

“I need your address, Cameron.”

“You can’t have it, Knox. Knox, what’s the matter? Just go home. You have that great place out in Greenwich.”

“I don’t want to go home, Cameron. Everything fucking reminds me of him. Everything.” It’s then that Cameron realizes Knox isn’t just crying into the phone. He’s full on sobbing.

Cameron loves Knox. He thinks of the stories Charlie told him at the bar all that time ago, when Knox was just his best friend. When Knox wasn’t writing lyrics that hit right to the heart. “Knox, honey,” Cameron breathes steadily. Cameron technically rents the apartment across the hall. He bought just enough furniture to make it seem real.

“Cameron,” Stick is next to him, clearly having heard the conversation. “Don’t bring him here.”

There's that fear that Stick always has, eating away at him. Cameron's just as scared as he is, but Knox is his friend. Not just his client.

"Where are you?"

"I'm in a bar in Greenwich. Near where that riot happened."

"Yes." Cameron knows exactly what he's talking about. Of course he does. "Are you drunk?"

"Yes."

"Can you get a cab if I tell you the address?"

"Yes. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I called you. But I can't go home. I just can't. He's everywhere. Everywhere." Stick hears this part of the conversation, and Cameron sighs. He says the address, and then Knox hangs up.

"You'll have to take him into your place."

"Why can't I take him in here?"

"You know why."

"He's drunk. It's Knox."

“Well he can’t come here.” Knox has seen the photo of the woman they don’t know in Stick’s office. Seen the ring he wears on his left finger. He frequently asks Stick about his life. His wife. His family.

Cameron studies him a moment, as if he’s under a microscope. This man he loves is too afraid to say anything about their relationship. Even to someone Cameron knows so well. Even to their close friend. It stings.

“He can go to my place.” Cameron says. It’s 1970. He doesn’t want to ring the New Year in with a fight. He doesn’t have the energy to anymore.

“Alright,” Stick nods, and bends down to pick up their cat.

It feels tense in the room. Cameron splits first, heading across the way to dust up anything that’s been sitting too long and make it look a little lived in. He probably won’t notice much of anything as his current situation suggests, but he doesn’t want to take any chances. They move around each other until Knox rings the bell, and Stick goes to bring him upstairs to the apartment that they don’t live in.

“I’m so sorry,” Knox shrugs his coat off, just missing the hook for it. “Sorry,” He peels off his shoes with the coat and leaves them all in a pile. “I’m so sorry,” He says again, but this time it’s accompanied by a hiccuping sob.

“It’s no problem. No problem. Have my bedroom. Stick has an extra bed in his place.”

Stick is pushing Knox onto the bed carefully, handing him an aspirin

and a glass of water, a trashbag with it all. He looks nervous.

“I”m so sorry I called you and that I’m here.”

“It’s no problem, Knox. Really.”

“Sorry about your wife having to be in on this too. I’m sorry.” Knox shakes his head, looking down at his feet.

Stick doesn’t respond to that.

“Don’t worry, Knox. Stick’s got extra room. We want you to be safe tonight.”

“Yeah. It just feels stupid. I can’t even be in my own home without everything reminding me of him. He’s in everything. My photos from school. My decor. My fucking songs.” He’s quieting down, but he’s still crying. Stick hands him a tissue.

“You’re going to be okay, Knox.” Cameron assures, placing a hand on his shoulder.

“Am I sick?” Knox asks, looking up at him. His eyes are watery, and his vision must be blurry from the alcohol and the current state he’s in. “I’ve got to be. I’ve got to be sick to feel like this.”

“You aren’t sick. You aren’t.”

“You don’t get it.” Knox cries out, and the sound is so painful that Camerons sits next to him, wrapping the fragile boy in his arms. “You just don’t get it.”

And Cameron, as smart as he is, really doesn’t know how to respond to that either. He sits with Knox a little longer, and then Knox mumbles that he wants to be alone. Cameron doesn't know how he got to be in this state, but he doesn't ask. That's for tomorrow. They leave silently, locking the place up behind them.

They're curling into bed around each other a little later, silent, when Stick breaks their match. "He isn't sick."

"I know."

"I don't want to be like that. I don't ever want to feel that way."

"Me either." Cameron agrees, inching closer.

"Is that how I make you feel?" Stick's throat feels like it's closing up.

"Sometimes."

Cameron hears Stick's breathing stutter. Watches as his form sits up, takes off his faux wedding band. Cameron closes the distance. They drift off without much more of a discussion.

two of us riding nowhere

Chapter Summary

1970. After New Years. Before New Years.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s two weeks later when half of the band is crammed into Stick’s office over an article in a magazine that has such a stupid name that they don’t bother to read it aloud.

“Hey,” It’s Neil who brings it up, because he’s mostly in charge of all the band’s PR now. “What happened to your photo?” He looks at Stick’s desk.

“It wasn’t working out.” Stick says, and the room settles.

“What?” Neil seems heartbroken. He's like Knox in that way. He loves love.

“Sometimes things don’t work out.” Stick says, because he doesn’t want to discuss it any further. There’s bigger fish to fry. His wedding band has been discarded of since that night Knox came to Cameron’s place. The pressing thing is the photo they’re looking at in front of them, plastered with a heinous title. Plastered with Meeks and Pitts, kissing on a hotel balcony in London.

“I don’t know what we’re going to do about this.” Cameron says, because he really doesn’t know what they’re going to do. It’s too much.

“You don’t know? What the fuck are we supposed to do?” Pitts all but roared, his hands in fists as he paced back and forth in Stick's office.

“It’s illegal!” Meeks says, as if it isn’t what they’re avoiding. “It’s illegal in every fucking state. And even if we don’t go to prison for it, it’s plain as day what we do in our free time.”

“You’re not going to go to prison.” Todd says, flipping through the attached article.

“You don’t know that,” Pitts says, and he looks so mad that he could start crying.

“What am I supposed to do?” Neil asks, his perch on Stick’s desk holding the room together. Cameron is leaning up against his bookshelf behind Stick, who is sitting in his desk chair. Pitts is pacing, and Meeks is sitting in one of the two chairs his office provides, Todd next to him.

“We could plant a story. Set up a photoshoot. Release a statement.”

“You’ve never dealt with anything like this.”

“No, but other people I know have.”

“No, they haven’t. All that Lennon McCartney shit wasn’t real. All that shit wasn’t. It never is. It’s rumors. This is real. This is photographic evidence.”

“Okay,” Stick exhales. “I haven’t.”

“What do you want us to do about it?”

“I could make something up pretty easily. But I don’t know if it will help with this.” Neil says, the photo too damning.

“I can’t fucking believe this.” Pitts is furious. “This is such fucking bullshit!”

“I know,” Cameron takes the magazine back from Todd, throwing it into the garbage. “Maybe we can make something up. Get everybody’s eyes on something else for the next time period.”

“Oh my god, it isn’t about that. It’s about how my personal relationships are on the cover of a tabloid.”

“They won’t always be.”

“No, they will. Now that everybody knows about us.”

“Gerard-”

“No. No! Don’t Gerard me. You don’t understand what this feels like, *Richard*. You don’t. If you have any personal relationships you keep them to yourself so much that we don’t even know about them. So excuse me for saying it, but whatever girl you’re seeing isn’t half as important as this. This could kill us. This could fucking ruin us.”

“It will ruin you.” Stick says, and the air crackles around them. “It will ruin you for a specific group of people.”

“Don’t want those assholes as your fans anyways.” Neil offers, a sad smile on his face.

“But your relationship won’t always be front and center.” Cameron says.

“It will be. You know it will be.”

“Gerard-”

“Stop it.”

“Neil,” Stick takes a deep breath, “Todd. Thanks for coming in you two. I’ll call you in about an hour or two when we’ve decided upon something.”

“Alright,” Todd nods, and waits for Neil to get up as they leave the office, Todd’s finger ghosting Neil’s back jean pocket.

“Where are Charlie and Knox right now?”

“I don’t know.”

“You should all be together before we release a statement.”

“You just don’t get what we’re going through.” PItts says, sliding into the chair, having finally ran the course of the room.

“Stop fucking saying that.” Stick barks it out, and the sound is enough to make all of the hair stand up on Pitts’ neck. “You don't know anything about my personal affairs.”

Cameron feels like his heart is sinking into the floor, taking his whole body through the floors and floors until he reaches what is certain to be the center of the earth. He’s terrified. He’s excited. Afraid. Hopeful.

“What?”

“We would have had this meeting whether Cameron called it or not.” Stick says, leaning back in his chair. He hasn’t looked at Cameron in the face yet. “I will figure this out for you two. If I have to release a company statement, I will. Your best bet would be to hang low for awhile. Stay with Charlie. Or Knox. We can get Neil to invent a story. Drugs. Something else. It’ll be blown over in a day or two. Maybe a week and a half at most.”

“I don’t know.” Meeks shakes his head, “I look like I’m in love with him.”

“You are.” Stick says, “No one is asking you not to be.”

“Am I missing something?”

“Things are changing around here. Hopefully for the better.” Stick answers, and that seems to be the end of the conversation. “Hang around here for an hour or so. You can go down to Ritchie’s office.”

The two battered hearts get up and leave, never far from the other. Cameron doesn’t know if they picked up the subtleties, but he knows he did. It’s a step forward. They’ve been taking baby ones since Knox had explained his predicament two weeks ago over a very hungover breakfast session. Cameron puts his hand on Stick’s shoulder, his back still turned to him in the chair.

“You better get down there.”

“Yeah,” Cameron nods, and Stick turns to see him. He’s got tears in his eyes.

Charlie wakes up with a hangover and the phone ringing off of the hook. He feels like he can’t see straight. He feels like throwing up. There’s a girl in his bed. He can’t remember her name. He lets the phone ring, and drags himself out of bed, finding clothes to throw on.

On the third separate ring, he answers.

“Did you heard the news?” Knox asks, anger coursing through his veins. Meeks had called him from Cameron’s office, a crying, desperate mess.

“Huh?” Charlie can barely think straight, let alone process anything.

He's gulping a glass of water as Knox continues talking. That gap between them is so large it isn't likely to ever close. He can't believe Knox is calling him.

"Did Meeks call you?"

"I don't know."

"Charlie." Knox and him don't have this repor. They don't speak to each other this way. His tone is a clue that Charlie isn't sure he wants to know the answer to.

"The press got Meeks and Pitts kissing. It's bad."

"Oh," Charlie hears those words, and thinks of how it could have been any of them. But how it had to be the most perfect duo of them all. "*Oh.*"

"Yeah," Knox nods, although he knows Charlie can't hear it.

"What's going to happen?"

"I don't know. But it's going to be brutal."

"Yeah."

"I'm really nervous, Charlie." It's the first time Knox has said something so personal since before New Years. New Years. The

hangover hits him again, a wave of emotions all occurring at once for him.

“Are we heading into the office?”

“I’ll pick you up in an hour and a half.”

They don’t say goodbye, but now Charlie is haunted by images of New Years Eve.

The girl he’s slept with comes out of his room naked, draping herself against the door frame of his bedroom.

“Where did you go?” She’s got a voice like velvet, and a great body. No wonder he’d been attracted to her. She’s got eyes that look like someone he knows. There it is. Fuck.

“Phone call,” Charlie doesn’t mean to be curt, but he needs to be alone. “You’ve got to leave.”

“Hm,” She answers, licking her lips. “You’re all the same, aren’t you?”

“What?”

“Rockstars.” She’s gathering her things up, and Charlie doesn’t have the energy to answer her. She’s out of his hair quickly, gathering her purse and jacket along with her clothes from the floor.

He supposes, as she leaves and he locks the door, that she's right. He knows she is. Because if she wasn't, then New Years wouldn't have happened. It did. And the guilt has been eating him alive ever since hasn't stopped gnawing. He rushes to the bathroom then, the hangover and the thoughts of that night creeping back to him.

2 weeks prior, New Years Eve (1969)

They're at one of the city's hottest clubs, and Charlie has been dancing with a girl all night who has platinum blonde hair and tells him shyly that she's an actress. Knox, who is across the dance floor (Charlie's eyes are always on him), is dancing with a girl with brown hair and green eyes. It's driving him up a wall. Charlie knows that Knox knows its driving him crazy.

So, Charlie does some things he isn't proud of. He does a line off of the girl's breast, gets drunker than he figures he's ever been, and takes a cocktail of things that are handed to him. He's sweaty, the music is loud, and it isn't until the New Year has came and gone that he finds Knox in the bathroom, washing his hands.

"Knox!" Charlie grins, because although looking at him hurts, and although he's in a trance, he still loves him. Despite everything. Despite himself.

"Charlie?" Knox looks at him as though he's unrecognizable. There's so many people in the bathroom, each more famous than the next. It's a space that feels safe to say anything, no matter who is looking at them. Nobody is going to remember anything in the morning.

"What?" Charlie smirks, and then Knox is pulling him into a stall, stepping over bodies.

“What are you doing to yourself?” He’s distressed. It’s coming to his ears slowly. Lapping at the shore.

“I’m having fun.” Charlie shakes his head, bewildered.

“No, you aren’t.”

“Yes I am.”

Knox looks at him, looks down at his lips. Charlie wants to kiss him.

“*Charlie*,” His voice sounds garbled. It’s like he sounded that last night. That registers like fire in a forest to Charlie. “You’re worrying me.”

“You don’t get to say that.”

“What?”

“Don’t say that.”

“You’re my best friend!”

“I know. But friendship wasn’t enough for us, was it?”

“What?” Charlie can see that he’s hit a nerve. Why is he still speaking?

“You just had to ruin everything for us, didn’t you?” Charlie doesn’t mean it as the words leave his mouth. He feels miserable. “You had to go and give me everything I’ve always wanted with you and more and you ruined everything we had.”

“*What*?” Knox looks like the wind has been knocked out of him.

“I’ve always wanted all of you. More. I wanted more and more and more and you did too.”

“Charlie…”

“I wanted to tell you-”

“You don’t get to blame this on me. You’re the one who agreed. You’re the one who wanted to do it again and again and again.”

“You’re the one who has been kissing that girl who looks like me all night.”

“Shut up.”

“She doesn’t know you like I do.”

“Charlie stop it.”

“Nobody will ever know you like I do.” Charlie edges the gap between them smaller, his breath on Knox hot. “You’re not going to let them.”

“You don’t know me. You don’t know that.”

“Yes, I do.”

“No you don’t.”

“Yes, I do. I’m the vision in your song. The one that’s keeping you up at night.”

Knox is rendered speechless.

“I know what you think of me.”

“No you don’t, Charlie. No you don’t.”

“Yes, I do.”

Knox has started to cry. “If you know everything about me, then I know about you too.”

“No you don’t.”

“Yes I do.” Knox is full on crying now, the tears humongous. “I’m the girl you'd come back to, but I’m not the girl you’d ever take home.”

“I took you home.”

“You *know* that’s not what I mean.”

“I don’t know. Spell it out for me. We never say what we mean anyways unless my dick’s been in your mouth.”

“You’re being mean.”

“What?”

“Stop saying stuff like that.”

“It’s true, isn’t it? We’re only honest if we’re fucking. And now that we aren’t doing that anymore, so we don’t have to be honest about anything. Right?”

“We agreed to not do that anymore. To not talk about it. We tried it. We finished it.”

“If we finished it, why are you still writing songs about me?”

“Stop that.”

“It doesn’t matter. We weren’t even honest when we were fucking each other either.”

“No,” Knox is wiping his eyes, but it appears that the floodgates have opened. “We weren’t.”

“Would you have been?”

“Yes. *Of course*. If I could do it all over again.” Knox pushes Charlie out of his personal space with two fingers, and there’s a beat where Knox thinks Charlie is going to kiss him for the second time in such a short period of time. He leaves Charlie alone, tears running down his face. Charlie leaves the club before Knox does with the blond, and he sees that Knox is on the phone, crying to someone.

That had been two weeks ago, and they haven’t spoken since. The only exchanges have been work related. They’re now farther apart than they had ever been. The word love sits bitterly in Charlie’s mouth, and he swirls around some mouthwash. He spits out the mint flavoring, but the love sticks like honey.

Knox will be here any minute, and he looks like shit. Knox has seen every part of him. An old T-shirt, jeans, and a hangover won’t be anything new to him. The ride is sure to be silent. But with what’s happening to Meeks and Pitts, his longest, dearest friends, his personal fire with Knox will be put out for the day, if only for peace to be restored for them all.

They hadn’t grown up together for nothing.

Chapter End Notes

I fear that I am making no sense your honor. but oh well. love you all for your incessant comments and love my dear moots. <3 you are all feeding me well.

like a complete unknown

Chapter Summary

A few weeks later.

It was a hard couple of weeks after the whole debacle of Meeks and Pitts on every cover and interviewed in every magazine under the sun. Everything was okay. It was going to be. By the time it has started, it was over. It was stressful, and it wasn't over, not in the long run, but they were finally safe. Safe enough to walk home together, safe enough to sit together in interviews again.

It was the beginning of festivals in the states wherein Stick had started traveling with the band every few gigs where anybody noticed anything.

Of course, Todd was the first to sense anything. The way that the office atmosphere had changed, Stick's generally more pleasant mood, and his sudden urge to get his hand in everything that the band was doing. Todd didn't mind. He was just a roadie, and by being a roadie, who was useful for setting up, moving gear, and any other odd job; he could focus on what he really loved, which was writing.

He wanted to be a writer like Knox, but Knox was eager to share his feelings (as complex as they sometimes tended to be) in songs, unafraid to run ideas by Todd. Ever since they had met, the two had been great friends, bouncing ideas off of each other and figuring out the best way to look at things.

A screaming match in the hall leads Knox to new material, and they're lounging in Todd's room, debating ways to make the song really pop. Neil was lying on the bed, flicking through some notebooks that he always had on him. He'd told Todd that when Letters was over, which they all assumed was going to come over the four like a tidal wave soon, he was going to write the definitive, most important expose on a

rock band ever. With consent, of course.

Todd was drumming a pencil on the table while Knox looked at the ceiling, chewing a piece of gum. Meeks and Pitts had been coming in and out at various times, showcasing things that they were doing on their day off. No one had seen Charlie all afternoon, and Knox was pretty certain that they weren't going to.

"Is everything alright between the two of you?" Neil asked, chewing on a pen. He was closer to Charlie out of the two of them. They had more similar personalities, and were virtually unafraid of anything. It must have been their shared traumatic pasts that made them so fearless, but Knox wasn't quite sure.

"Nothing is ever alright between the two of us." Knox sighs, lyrics and lines rolling around in his head that are full of malice and anger.

"Well, it used to be."

"What happened?" Todd asks, because the longer they sit, the more entranced he becomes with Knox's words and thoughts, the more interested he becomes in what the two of them are, or what they had been. He wants to understand how two people can love each other so much but not do anything about it.

Because he knows that they do. He knows that Charlie loves Knox with everything he has, despite never having heard the words from him himself. He would be blind to see that Knox doesn't love Charlie. He's seen the poems. Listened to the music.

"It's complicated." Knox blows a stream of air through his mouth. "It's been complicated for me since I was 12 years old, but then we started doing something else that made everything so much worse. And it's

never going to be better. And it's all my fault."

"You've known him since you were 12?" Neil is all ears, and it's not for selfish reasons. He genuinely loves and cares about each of the members, and wants to learn more. That's why he's so invested.

"I met him my first day of school at Welton Academy. It's in Vermont. It's a boys school. Meeks, Pitts, Charlie, and I, we all met there. I joined the school when I was in the sixth grade, since my parents thought it would be good for me. He was my roommate."

"Really?"

"Yeah. He was the first person I met, and the first real friend I ever had. I was pretty head over heels for him. In every sense of the word."

"That's romantic," Neil smiles, "Since you were 12."

"Yeah. It took me maybe a semester to feel that way."

"Did you guys have a big fight?"

"No," Knox shakes his head. Neil hadn't heard then, about what Todd had seen. Unless Charlie had told him. The fight last night wasn't anything to write home about. Just malice thrown around.

"I thought you must have. Charlie said you did."

“When did he say that we had a fight?”

“Oh, New Years.”

“Oh,” Knox feels himself bristle. He doesn’t like to be reminded of it, and it still stings. “Yeah. That was our first fight that got really bad.”

“It doesn’t always have to be like this.” Todd offers, because he knows that Charlie and Knox are more complex than Knox is making it seem.

“It feels like it does.”

“Todd’s right.”

“Everything’s just been so fucked up since I slept with him.”

“Was it?”

“Was it what?”

“Was it fucked up because you slept with him, or because you two can’t figure out your feelings?”

“It was my fault we slept together. My fault that we kept sleeping together.”

“Charlie must have decided to do it too, though. You weren’t alone.”

“No,” Knox nods, because Neil is right despite how Knox feels. “But our decision to sleep together was my idea alone.”

“Does Charlie know how you feel about him? How you really feel?”

“Of course not. I’ve loved him since I was 12. That’s not exactly something you say to someone who you’ve been best friends with for a decade.”

“I think you could.” Neil offers, clicking his pen in and out, in and out. “I think you can tell someone you love them exactly when you feel it’s right to.”

“I don’t think it’s ever been right. That’s my problem.”

“Sometimes, if it’s eating you alive, you have to be the one to take the first bite.”

“So wise,” Knox smiles, but the advice isn’t going to help him. He isn’t going to tell Charlie any time soon, if ever.

“I’m serious. I told Todd I loved him two weeks after I met him. Over the phone.”

Knox turns to Todd with a bewildered look on his face. It doesn’t seem

quite real, but the two never have been ones to shy away from saying what's on their mind.

"You should tell him. Even if you don't love him anymore. Maybe it would clear things up."

"I don't think it will," Knox gets up, itching for something. A cigarette, a drink, anything to take his mind off of what he's thinking about for a little while. Maybe he just needs to watch the television. "Besides, he's been going through a lot lately. I don't want to tell him when he's like this."

"I told the guys they need to stop taking that shit. They won't listen to me." Todd agrees.

"Do you guys know where we could get some shrooms?" Knox asks, and the two lovers burst out into laughter from the bizarre-ness of it all.

Then, they're all laughing. It's the first time Knox has laughed this hard in a long while, and the feeling has so much relief for him that he flops onto the bed, the sound and glee reverberating around the room.

"Of course I do." Todd answers, once they've all calmed down.

"We should ask Pitts if he wants to."

"Yeah," Knox agrees, because he's never done them and surely won't do them twice, but the idea is fun. Plus, he hasn't spent quality time with Pitts or Meeks in awhile. For pleasure, that is. Everything has

been work, work, work recently. It's exhausting.

"I'll call up Peter." Todd says, and then they all get back to what they're doing. Eventually, Knox knows he will too. But right now, he wants to stare at the ceiling. How many ceilings had he stared in hotel rooms over the years? How much longer was he going to be staring at them? He wasn't sure the fun of touring was there anymore. It didn't feel like it was. There was a lingering sadness in his heart, and he wished he could name it with something that wasn't love.

For the first time in his life, Richard Cameron was actually having a fun time at work. He was currently eating breakfast in bed, enjoying himself as Stick lounged next to him. It was warm in their room, and the balcony door was open a bit, a light breeze flickering in through the curtains. It was peaceful, he was in love, and his partner, for the first time in six years, wasn't scared to wake up next to him if other people were around them.

Their domestic bliss could only last so long, because a loud knock on the door drew Cameron from his bed. He ran a hand through his hair, smiling at Stick as he trudged to the door.

"Who is it?"

"Charlie! Cam, open up. Right now."

Cameron opened the door, and before he could think about how Charlie Dalton would be the first person to see his most intimate relationship, he started to speak. "Cameron." Charlie was at the door, and the look on his face told Cameron that something terrible was happening.

“Charlie?” Charlie let himself in, not doing anything more than nodding at a shirtless Stick before he went back to his terrified speech. “What’s the matter?”

“Remember that girl? From New Years?”

“Uh…” Cameron hadn’t been there, so of course he didn’t. “No.”

“Fuck. Fuck!”

“What’s going on?”

“She called me. She’s pregnant. She’s pregnant, and she’s keeping the baby. It’s my baby.”

Cameron doesn’t know what to say.

“Fuck.” Came Stick’s response.

And then, even through Charlie’s terror, “Are you sleeping with the boss?”

says he has no friend

Chapter Summary

Charlie's affections for Knox have always run deep.

"I'm sorry, what?" Cameron is in shock. He feels like it's completely possible that he's just awoken from some sort of dream, and not the kind that end in happiness and rainbows.

"That girl. From New Years. Is pregnant. And I'm the father."

"Good god, Charlie."

"I don't know what to do. I don't… I can't be a father."

"Are you sure it's yours? Like, absolutely positive?"

"She said it's mine. I don't think she'd necessarily lie. It's not like I'm Mick Jagger or something."

"True," Stick shakes his head, "But you are Charlie Dalton."

"That doesn't even mean anything," Charlie shakes his head. "I just had to come to you. Because I don't know what to do."

"Well, I don't either." Cameron sighs, "This is kind of a big fucking deal, Charlie."

“I know. I know that.”

Another knock at the door gives Cameron a headache. So much for a quiet moment with Stick. Now the whole fucking building was going to know about his intimate affairs and all before ten in the morning.

“Who is it?”

“It’s Knox! Have you seen Pitts?”

“No!”

“Can I come in?”

“Knox, you know I love you, but not right this minute.”

“Oh, uh, okay!” Knox replied, jovial and sweet as ever before the padding of footsteps took him away.

“*Fuck*,” Charlie looks down at his feet, and Cameron understands, suddenly, why this is such a big deal. Why Charlie had to come to him. Why he can’t go to the one place that Cameron would assume he’d go first.

Charlie looks like he’s going to cry. It’s maybe the first time in a long while that he’s looked intensely sober. He looks, for a fraction of a second, like the Charlie that started all of this mess.

“Did I interrupt you?”

“We had to get up anyways.” Stick says, “But, uh, we should probably get you some food. Breakfast. Have you eaten?”

“No.”

It’s silent a few more moments as the two lovers get themselves together, pulling on pants and slipping shirts over their heads. Charlie sits in the chair in their room, looking at the floor, twiddling his thumbs.

“We’re just going to get ready. We’ll meet you down there.” Stick said, and Cameron shot Charlie a glance that could have wrapped Charlie into a secure, loving blanket.

“We’ll be right with you. Okay?”

“Okay.” Charlie nods, getting up and going to wait for the two outside. “What did your wife say?” He asks next, looking as if he’s going to bolt. “When it all came crashing down, I guess.”

Stick stills, because he knows that there’s been the question around the office. The ring has been gone. The photograph has been thrown out, the frame from the thrift store with it.

“I never had a wife.”

“What?”

“It’s always been Cameron. Always.”

Charlie lets out a sound that echoes on mangled, and the two lovers feel a shock of fear from it all.

Charlie finds himself out of the room quicker than he had meant to go, tripping over his feet as he lets himself lead down to the hotel lobby. They’re serving breakfast, and it’s all that he can do to not start crying. *It’s always been Cameron* . Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck. He finds himself popping another pill, grabbing a cup of black coffee to wash it down. He isn’t sure what it is. Anything to not make him feel the way he’s feeling right now.

He sees Meeks and Pitts laughing together, close but after the whole incident, never close enough. Todd and Neil are sitting together, their feet close underneath the table as they both write in their separate notebooks. And of course, there’s Knox. Knox, who he is always looking for. Despite himself, despite everything. His whole mind is consumed with the boy.

Knox is with Peter, their roadie. After they got picked up, they hired him. He’s been with them through nearly the beginning, and they all like him. He’s got great stuff, and he’s also pretty good at his job. Getting them into places, too. Of course, it probably doesn’t help that Peter is like him. It doesn’t help, because Peter is making Knox laugh this morning. Making him grin in the way that Charlie used to make him grin.

The jealousy curdles in his gut.

“Missing anything today?” He asks, going up to them as if he hadn’t just gone to Cameron with news that changed his life.

“Knoxie here wants to do shrooms. Just once.” Peter smiles, erratic and a bit out of it. He always is.

He looks at Knox, looks at Peter, and it’s another shock wave to Charlie’s system so early in the morning. Peter likes him.

He feels that white hot, jealous rage fill him up just like that night that he thought Knox was going to get with their long ago fired roadie. He actually felt sick to his stomach thinking of it, suddenly. Knox had said something that they’d never spoken of again. That he’d been in worse off situations than the one he was in that night. He felt sick remembering that night.

“Good morning?” Peter laughs, looking at Charlie.

“Sorry,” He shakes his head. He’s having a baby. He can’t think about Knox. He shouldn’t. But Knox is really the reason he’s in this mess now. Their fight on New Years had led to him trying to forget the whole night. He’d woken up naked and hungover with a girl whose name he couldn’t remember.

“Hi,” He says, nodding at him. Knox looks adorable, as Charlie figures he’s always going to.

Deep down, Charlie knows he’s always wanted a family. But recently, that white picket fence life has been full of dreams where he comes home from work to Knox. Even through whatever evil fight they’re having now, and probably won’t stop having, they’ve been pretty civil in public.

“See you around,” Knox nods, taking his coffee over to Meeks and Pitts’ table.

“You want to join?”

“With what?”

“The shrooms.”

“Oh,” Charlie looks back at Knox, “No.”

“Did you two have a fight?”

“Something like that.”

“I’m sorry. I know how hard it is when you fight with your best friend.”

“Yeah.”

“Look, Charlie,” Peter sighs, and something bubbles in Charlie’s gut again. That jealousy. “I’ve been meaning to ask you for awhile, but it’s never felt like the right time. I think asking to do shrooms really gave me my answer.”

“Your answer to what?”

“To my whole problem.”

“What’s your problem?”

“Knox.”

“Hm?”

“I’ve liked him for awhile, and I think he’s been trying to tell me the same thing. He asked me to do shrooms, Charlie. No way he’s being serious.”

“You think he likes you?”

“He’s always so secretive when I ask him who his songs are about. Plus, one time I heard him with somebody when I was trying to find my room. I was really high, but the other voice was a man’s. That’s when I knew I had a chance.”

“When was that?”

“What?”

“When did you hear that?”

“I don’t know. A few months ago. Before New Years, definitely. I don’t remember when exactly.”

"*Oh*," Charlie says, because no matter when it was, if it had been that long ago, he hadn't made the connection that the other voice was himself.

"It sounded good. I figured he'd be good in bed."

"You figured?"

"He's so brilliant. You sing his music. I always think brilliant artists are probably a great lay."

"Hm."

"You're telling me you don't think Knox would be a good lay?"

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't say anything."

"No," Charlie shakes his head, "I didn't. Because actually Knox is-" His sentence gets cut off by Cameron and Stick entering the place, hot on their heels after him.

"Morning, boss!" Peter laughs, doing a mock salute towards Cameron.

"Wishing me luck, Charlie?"

“No. I don’t think I am.” But Peter doesn’t hear it as he goes to sit with Knox and his oldest friends.

That stings. More than it should. He knows people love Knox. Especially since he writes the majority of their songs. Songs of love and loss and romance and feelings that Charlie has always hoped, ever since he was a kid, really, that Knox would reciprocate. And now, Knox has millions of fans all over the world that wish the songs were about them too. Because they aren’t all about Charlie, and maybe none of them even are, but he knows, sometimes, from the way Knox looks at him while they’re on stage that they are.

And now, Charlie’s got a kid on the way and Knox is smiling at Peter and it feels like maybe, just maybe, the world is slipping from his fingers. This carefully constructed relationship he’s had with Knox is shifting. Because he loves him. He does. He loves him despite the Monday morning. Despite having just received a phone call that’s going to change his life. Despite the fight they have had and can’t stop having. Charlie loves him.

Charlie loves his bangs. Loves his books with markings in them. Loves his journals of all shapes and sizes that he has to travel with at all times, always writing something in them. Loves the boy he was and the man he’s become. Loves the way that he takes time with all of the reporters to answer their questions, especially if they’re women. Loves that he has always put his friends first. Loves the mole on his back, right where his ribs end on the right side. Loves the freckle on his left shoulder. Charlie loves everything about him. And that fact is enough to sober him up for the entire morning.

He knows he’s always loved Knox, but this jealous, rage filled realization has him tossing and turning inside. The news he’s received is only making it worse. He thinks back to a night when they were sixteen, curled against each other on what was the coldest night of the year, January.

“Do you want to have kids?” Knox asks, cuddled into Charlie’s arms. It had been a particularly hard day of school, and there had been one teacher after the next that thought Knox’s work hadn’t been enough. Charlie didn’t think twice as Knox crawled into his arms.

“What?”

“Do you want to have kids one day?”

“I don’t know. My childhood has been bad enough.”

“I do.”

“Yeah?”

“I’d be the best dad ever. You don’t think so?”

“I think you could be good at just about anything.”

“I’ve always wanted a family when I’m older. Think of what great dads we would be. Our own were so terrible. We’d know everything that they did wrong. Nobody would have to keep suffering.”

“That’s great.”

“You’d be a good dad. Funny. Charming. All the moms would want

you.”

“The dads too, right?”

Knox laughs, and snuggles closer. “I can’t wait to grow old.”

“I want to stay young forever.”

“No,” His breath is hot on Charlie’s neck, intoxicating. “You can’t. I want to grow old. I want to grow old with you.”

Bygone memories of long ago days have Charlie worked up enough for a tear to threaten spilling into his morning coffee.

Cameron appears as though he wants to have a meeting, and Charlie isn’t one to stop him. He needs to go to a meeting. He needs to do anything but sit at the breakfast nook, watching idly as Knox gets flirted with and he’s haunted by long ago dreams of what they used to be. Best friends.

He’d do anything to have his best friend back now, despite all of it. And now with the baby on the way, he doesn’t know if he’ll ever get him back.

the way you make me feel

Chapter Summary

Charlie tells Knox his news.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's another couple of days into the new year in which Meeks is pretty sure that they might be the best band in the entire world that he notices something is off. Really, really off. He hasn't been as close to Charlie as he was in school in years.

He was a part of one of the most successful American bands of the last century. Their American tours were so sold-out that they'd had to add multiple dates to most big cities. It felt good, to be able to say that they were a part of something big.

And they had a great team to do it with. Pitts, Knox, Charlie. Their beloved Todd and Neil. Cameron and Stick managing. Then there were others. Peter the roadie. Phyllis, who was a groupie that showed up now and again, depending on the city. She was always with an entourage of people that she caravaned around with. They'd built a little community, and it felt good to be in a place where they could love each other so deeply.

However, recently there had been some sort of shift. Charlie was spiraling out of control. He had to be. They barely saw him anymore if it wasn't on stage, and even then, the long ago days of tenderness shared on stage were long gone. He performed, and he was brilliant, but the words were like knives to him. Meeks could tell that. He knew that the songs were about Charlie. Because of anybody in Knox's life, it was Charlie who wore lipstick and played hooky and surely kissed fiercely.

Knox loved him. He did. It was as simple as that fact. He was drawn to him. When they were onstage, Knox looked at him as if he wanted to devour him whole. Charlie often looked back at him the same way, but recently, he'd been in a bit of a cloud.

The whole shrooms incident hadn't really helped either. Just as they were about to do them, Knox had chickened out, spending the night in his room. Meeks had ended up babysitting Neil, Todd, Pitts, and Peter, who were all discussing things that weren't making any sense. Monkeys and ice cream and Ginsberg.

But the real problem was Charlie. Peter had lots going for him as a roadie. Mostly, he could get drugs. Lots of them. And good ones. Charlie took advantage of that. A lot of the time. But recently, it seemed as though there had been a falling out between himself and Peter. Now, Meeks had no idea where Charlie was getting anything, which was somehow scarier than when Peter had been giving it to him.

Currently, they were cooling down from a show, chatting idly in the green room. Charlie was a tad more jittery than normal. Knox was picking at his fingers to the side, and Pitts was trying to keep his hands off of Meeks. Todd was packing up their things and Neil was writing in his notebook, taking snapshots of Knox's picking and Meeks' smiling face.

"Great show tonight!" Peter said, smiling at the group, having come into the room to join up with Todd. Peter normally did sound checks for the group, as he and Todd had different things that they were good at when it came to being roadies.

"Thanks!" Pitts grins, a finger in Meeks' back pocket pulling reluctantly away.

“Knox, I was wondering if I could ask you something?” The room settles into a silence that chokes Charlie.

“Uh,” Knox goes away from biting his nails another minute to turn to Peter. Peter, who is tall and lanky and has blond hair and blue eyes and is pretty much everything Charlie isn’t. “Sure. What about?”

“Something I’ve been meaning to ask you.”

The two leave the room, Neil goes out to pester Todd, and then it’s just the three of them again. As it always had been.

“Fuck.”

“Charlie?”

“What?”

“You okay?”

“I’m fine, Meeks.” Charlie grins though it doesn’t reach his eyes, and takes a swig something, which the couple can’t name.

The couple doesn’t ask him anything else as they watch him. He’s anxious. They can tell from the way that his posture changed and the way that he looks after the two nervously that he doesn’t like the pairing. Todd and Neil have no problem with Peter, who has never been anything but nice, even though he does have the best drugs and they don’t really go for that type of stuff themselves. Meeks and Pitts,

however, certainly don't know him well enough to make any crude remarks.

Charlie looks as though he's seen a ghost as he looks at the two as they pad back in. Knox goes to the bathroom, and then Peter goes out to the van with Neil and Todd, shaking his head. Charlie wants to be a better person, wants to go to Knox and ask if he said no and if he said no, why did he say no? But he can't bring himself to. All he can do is follow Peter, who is mumbling about how Knox doesn't want to get involved with anybody for a long, long while.

"I just don't get it. It's not like he's been involved with anybody." He sighs, a hand in his blond hair. "What am I doing wrong?"

"I'm sure you didn't do anything wrong. Maybe he really just needs time." Neil says, ever the wise of the bunch.

Charlie doesn't offer any words of encouragement. He has none to give.

He watches Peter wallow for a few more minutes, offering nothing as he gets up to go.

The next day that passes by passes slower than most. It's a traveling day, and without the promise of a concert when they reach their next city, the lure to go out to a local bar or dive of some sort is overwhelming. It doesn't take long for Peter to find a place that they can go, and so the rag tag group all follow. Cameron and Stick had stayed put at the hotel, along with Neil and Todd. That left a few of the other roadies, Peter, Charlie, Knox, Meeks, and Pitts for a night on the town.

The club was loud inside. So loud, in fact, that Charlie took something

that Peter had slipped him, a gummy bear. It tasted nothing like a gummy bear he'd ever had, but he wasn't too concerned by it. He wanted to get his mind off of everything that was happening. Just yesterday, he'd found out he was going to be a father. He was the lead singer of one of America's biggest bands. And to top it all off, he was in love with his best friend. If he could even call him his best friend any longer.

As the night grew later, Charlie was washing his hands in the bathroom. He was surprised to see Knox next to him, someone's lipstick on his collar. That jealousy curdled in his gut again. Without thinking, he slid into the space between them, connecting them together.

"Charlie?"

"I've got to talk to you." He felt a bit floaty from whatever Peter had given him, but it felt calming. Like for once in his life, he was taking a big, deep breath.

"About what?" Knox shakes his head. His cheeks are flushed. He's drunk.

"I can't do it here."

"I'm not leaving this place with you."

"What? Why?"

"You know why." Knox is looking at him like he could devour him. It's turning Charlie on.

“It’s really important.”

“What’s it about, Charlie?”

“I can’t tell you here.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s going to change my life.”

He’s got Knox intrigued. Knox narrows his eyes, picks his drink up from the bathroom sink, and downs the rest. Charlie doesn’t know what number he’s on, and he doesn’t ask. He’s had quite a few himself. They don’t say goodbye to their friends, if they’re still inside. Charlie hails a cab and they clamor in, silent as they get to their hotel. Knox pays handsomely in cash, and they stagger into the place.

Knox fumbles for his room key after the elevator had spit them out, and then they trickle into his room. It’s the first time they’ve been alone in a long while.

“What did you have to tell me?” Knox is playing with his tie, trying to get it off.

“I fucked up.”

Knox laughs.

“What?”

“Yeah. Yeah, you fucking did.” Knox runs a hand through his hair. It’s getting longer than it normally is. “But I did too. We’ve been through this.”

“It’s not about us.”

“What’s it about then?”

“I just found out. I’ve barely told anyone. I wanted you to be my first friend to know.”

“Don’t take a solo career.”

“What?”

“You’re nothing without my words, Dalton.”

Charlie stammers at that, because despite the viciousness of it, Charlie knows he’s right. “I’m not going to take a solo career.”

“Yeah,” Despite Charlie’s own drunken state, Knox is much worse off than he is. “I know you aren’t going to leave me. Us. Despite everything.”

“*Knox*,” Charlie sits next to him on the bed, pressing their thighs together, trying to close the gap that’s widening and widening and widening. It’s been swallowing them recently.

“What, Charlie?” Knox’s breath is hot on Charlie’s face.

“That girl. From New Years. Do you remember her?”

“Of course I do. I remember everything about that night.”

“Oh,”

“You don’t. I know you don’t. That’s okay.”

“No, I don’t. And that’s just the problem.”

“I cried myself to sleep at Cameron’s apartment.”

Charlie lets that settle in. Thinks long and hard about how Cameron has his own place, when he thought that he lived with Stick.

“He must work a lot. It wasn’t very lived in.”

The ring from Stick’s finger had disappeared after New Years. The photo of the wife on the table. The mentions of getting home to a wife and a family. Knox had seen them in their life alone and not even realized it. Did they cause the two to come to their own terms? Charlie still didn’t know enough about it all quite yet.

“That girl from New Years called me.”

“*Oh*,”

“Not like that.”

Knox looked at him, careful. “You don’t want me to date Peter, do you?”

“What?” Charlie shook his head, “That’s got nothing to do with what I’m about to tell you, Knox.”

“What if I wanted to?”

“He said you didn’t. Let me finish what I had to say.”

“What if I want to. You wouldn’t let me, would you?”

“You can make your own decisions.”

“Not when it comes to my love life.”

“Yes, you can.”

“I can’t seem to date anybody since you.”

“We weren’t dating.”

“No.”

“Look, let me finish what I’m saying.”

“Okay. Okay.”

“That girl from New Years called me. Apparently she’s pregnant with my baby.”

“Be serious,” Knox shakes his head, letting the space between them grow exponentially.

“I am.”

“You’re having a baby?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re having a *baby*.”

“Yes.”

“Fuck.”

“I know.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know.”

“*Fuck*.”

“That’s what I’ve been thinking all day.”

“So after our fight you…”

“I don’t remember anything. That’s the worst part. I woke up naked in a house I’d never seen before with a girl whose name I couldn’t remember. And now she’s pregnant.”

“You sound awful.”

“I know.”

“You’re really going to be a dad?”

“I guess so.”

Knox looks at him. His cheeks are still tinged pink, and he looks braver than he typically is. “And you’re jealous.”

“What? That’s not what this is about. I’m not jealous.”

“Yes, you are. If you weren’t, you wouldn’t care if I sleep with Peter or date him or whatever I please with him.”

“What you do in your spare time doesn’t have anything to do with me.”

“I know what you do in your spare time doesn’t have anything to do with me, but it’s not the same the other way around. Is it?”

“Stop it, Knox.”

“Nothing I do is enough for you. I suggest if you want me so fucking badly, you should really just get it over and fuck me.”

“Stop it.”

“If you want me, why don’t you just say it?”

“You know I-”

“Are you going to marry her?”

“What?”

“The mother of your child. Are you going to marry her?”

“You know I’m not.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Yes, I do.”

“No, you don’t.”

“You’re going to fall in love with that kid. She’s a part of it. You might fall in love with her too. You barely even know her name. She could turn out to be a really great girl.”

“I won’t.”

“Have you ever loved anybody, Charlie? Truly loved them. Without any strings attached.”

“Yes.” He says, and the air crackles.

“It isn’t me.”

Charlie’s silence feels like an answer to a long awaited question.

“It isn’t. Because if you loved me, if you really fucking loved me, you wouldn’t have a kid on the way.”

“That’s not fair.”

“It’s true.”

“If *you* really loved me, you would have told me. You wouldn’t have written it for me to sing. You would have told me about all your dreams. All that aching. All that love and no place to put it.”

“*Charlie*,” He’s exasperated from the response.

“So what if I’m jealous? What’s it to you anyways?”

“You’ve got to let me have my life, okay?” Knox stifles something that sounds like a cry. His eyes are watering. “You can’t be in it anymore.”

“Knox,” Charlie’s hands find him despite it all. Despite the space between them. He wants to kiss him.

“I can’t do it anymore, Charlie. It breaks my heart.”

“I know. I know.”

“You’re breaking my heart, Charlie.”

“You can see Peter. He really likes you.”

“You’re breaking my heart, Charlie.”

They fall into a rhythm. Charlie’s palms on his face. Knox’s hands on his hips. “Stop it, stop it.” Knox is murmuring, pulling away from Charlie’s lips. He keeps saying it over and over again as he pulls himself back to Charlie. He’s kissing him. He’s telling him to stop. He’s pulling him closer.

The rhythm they find is easy. They know each other best, after all. It’s the most clean Charlie has been in months. Knox is kissing him like it’s their first time, if they’d had a first time that was tender, younger. If they’d been teenagers. It isn’t right. With the time between them, the lost hours and miscommunication and angst and fear and anger, but it’s what they know how to do. And it doesn’t help that they’re both drunk. That makes it worse. Worse and worse and worse and worse and worse. Charlie’s shirt and Knox’s pants and the inhibitions and evil words and fighting all fall to the floor, a misshapen pile of things.

“You’re gonna be a dad,” Knox breathes against him, “Heavy.”

“Yeah.”

“Remember when we were kids?” He shifts, kisses him from a different angle. “I told you I wanted to be a dad.”

“Yeah. It was January. I said I didn’t want to grow up. You told me you wanted to grow old with me.”

“I still think you’re going to be a great dad.”

“I still think you’re good at just about anything.”

“Did you ever think we’d be here?”

“In the band?”

“Of course not. I know that answer is no.”

“You mean like this?” Charlie asks, his hand resting against Knox’s bare chest.

“Yeah.” Knox is sobering up, and so is Charlie, but they’re still far gone enough to know that when they wake up, they’re going to be in so much trouble. “Growing old together.”

“I don’t know.”

“I dreamt about it. I wished for it to happen. I wished so long and hard that you said yes.”

“You have a lot of dreams about me.” *I love you.*

“I’ve been dreaming about you since I walked into Welton Academy.” *I love you.*

Charlie kisses him then, because he doesn't think that he has the capability to say anything without it being *I love you. I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you.*

Chapter End Notes

added a lot more chaps to this if you haven't noticed very excited woot woot

a man waits in the shadows

Chapter Summary

> They meet with this infamous woman. Charlie's a blubbering mess of himself.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next morning, Knox woke up with a headache. One that was so painful that he outwardly groaned. Charlie, who was also just beginning to wake up, shifted against him.

“Hi.” He said, his voice gruff and his head pounding.

“Hi.” Knox replied, a look in his eyes that could have moved Charlie to tears.

They sit in silence again, just looking at the other, studying. This wasn’t the first time that they had done it, and it wouldn’t be the last.

“I’m sorry.” Knox whispers, his voice pained.

“I am too.”

“I shouldn’t have done it again. You’re going to be a father.”

“I’m sorry I was jealous.”

Knox's look shifts, and then he shoots up and out of the bed, running for his bathroom. Charlie hears some retching sounds, and he sits up, padding over to the bathroom. When he arrives, Knox is drinking a glass of water, his toothbrush in his hand. He's got new boxers on. They have little hearts on them. Knox loaned them to him last night. He offers Charlie a headache pill, and he takes it, along with his own glass of water.

"I'm sorry too." Knox replies, a callback to their previous conversation.

"For what?"

"I was jealous too. Of course I was."

"The kid?"

"You're going to have an entire life. I'm not going to be a part of it."

"Why don't we ever just say what we mean?"

"Because you're drunk. Or high. Both. All of the time now."

Charlie doesn't say anything. Just stands there, watching him.

"I care about you, Charlie. You know how much I do."

"We could try it again."

“What?”

“We could try it again.”

“You know what happened the last time.”

“And then we did it again.”

“It’s so painful, Charlie. It’s too painful.”

“I know.”

“It breaks my heart.”

“But we keep coming back. Don’t we?”

“Just this once. We shouldn’t do it again.”

“We’ll just keep coming back.”

“No, we won’t.” Knox puts his toothbrush back in his bag, and splashes some water on his face, drying it carefully with a towel. “Don’t look at me like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like you’re in love with me.”

They both still from the words, taking the other in.

“You don’t want any part of me anymore? At all?”

“Of course I do.”

“So… we could try again?”

“You should tell the band first. About your kid.” Knox turns to face him. Charlie’s edging closer without really realizing it.

“I don’t know how to. I just learned about it myself. I told you that.”

“What’s her name?”

“Olivia. She said she’s flying in to see the show tonight. So we can talk.”

“She’s going to fall in love with you.”

“I’m fairly certain from her message that she’s not.”

“Maybe you’ll fall in love with her too.”

“You know I won’t.”

“You don’t know that, Charlie.”

“Yes, I do.”

“I’m going to breakfast.”

“Alright.” Charlie responds, staying put in the little bathroom. Knox isn’t sure if he wants him to follow him, but he doesn’t want to waltz into breakfast with a new hickey and Charlie Dalton at his right. In fact, as he eats and catches up with Neil and Todd, Charlie never comes to breakfast.

And then, he doesn’t see him until the concert that night, right before they go on stage.

“Charlie?”

“What?” His eyes look hazy. He looks exhausted. He looks crazy.

“Are you okay?”

“Never better. We’ve got a show to do.”

“Yeah,” Knox nods, but the words don’t reach his eyes. He wants to say a myriad of things. He wants to scream at Charlie. How had everything changed from their one night together? He was meeting the woman who was carrying his child after this concert. Didn’t he want to be sober for that?

Charlie left the area of the green room, to go get ready backstage. Meeks and Pitts looked just as scared as Knox did, and then it all got even worse when a knock on the door sounded clear through the air. Neil was bringing Olivia in. Olivia, who was the mother of Charlie’s child.

Peter came up to him, asking something about the show. Knox didn’t hear anything that was coming out of his mouth. He didn’t like Peter, and he certainly didn’t want to sleep with him. He was sweet, but he wasn’t someone Knox could ever be with.

The girl in front of them, who was probably around their age, maybe a year or two younger, looked around at them all. She had a badge around her neck, signaling her status for VIP at the concert. How trivial it all was. She had blue eyes, blonde hair, and she was wearing a t-shirt and jeans. She was, without a doubt, incredibly gorgeous. Fuck.

When Knox got offstage, he wasn’t sure that he wanted Olivia to see Charlie. He’d been an animal on stage. A true, honest animal. He was jumping around, screaming out the lyrics, interacting with the crowd and touching them and engaging so much that the three other members of the band had to look around at each other to make sure that the Charlie singing tonight was the Charlie they’d grown up with.

It was crazy. But not in a way that was unattractive. It was crazy in a way that made Knox's blood run hot, especially when Charlie called out to him and started singing wildly in his face as he played along. He was trying really hard to make sure it didn't look like it was affecting him, but it was probably one of the hardest things Knox had ever had to do. His eyes were wild and he looked like an animal that had been let out of its cage.

Knox thinks about how all the words Charlie has said on stage were about himself. How Charlie knew, one way or another, that each of them was about him. All the love, all the anger. Everything in between and everything since they'd started their little coupling. His behavior was warranted by whatever high he was on, but only if you got really close could you tell. Knox found, deep down, that he was rabid to kiss him; needed to put his lips on Charlie's like he needed air. But there was an audience. And more than ever, Knox wanted to be on his best behavior tonight.

Knox looked at him as they came off stage and into the little green room, greeted by Neil, Todd, Peter, and Olivia. Charlie was the last to enter, blowing a kiss to what was likely the group of groupies that they had all gathered. He entered the room with a bravado that Knox knew was artificial. He was not only still riding a high of some kind, but he was also riding a high of adrenaline, and the two together were a lethal mix.

Knox knew this, because instead of saying anything to Olivia, he sild into the space between himself and Todd, tucking a pointer finger in Knox's jean pocket. Knox shifted so that it slipped out.

"I hope it's alright that I came here, Charlie." Olivia began, and Knox was really, really fucking bothered now. Charlie was trying to get his hand in his pants, and the mother of his child was talking to him. And not only that, but she was fairing to just be about one of the sweetest girls Knox had ever met.

“I’ll head out back. We can get the gear later. Tomorrow, even.” Peter said, sending Knox a look that was begging him to follow. Knox didn’t really want to.

“Charlie, I really need to talk to you. Privately, if possible. I’m sorry.”

“It’s no problem.” Pitts smiled, a bit confused by it all. He still didn’t know that Charlie was going to have a baby. Knox needed a drink.

“We can get out of here early.” Meeks agreed, because of course he did.

“Yeah,” Knox agreed, but Charlie was a different person tonight, so he didn’t agree with any of them.

“Why don’t we all go out? We could get a drink.”

“*Charlie*,” Knox didn’t know why it flew out of his mouth so fast, but he couldn’t stop it as soon as it started.

“Bad suggestion, ey?”

“Olivia, right?” Todd swooped in, like an eagle with golden wings. “Can I interest you in seeing the bathroom for a quick second?”

“Yeah, and I can show you some of the footage of the band. You’re a fan, right?”

“If I wasn’t, I wouldn’t be here.” She said, and a glum look came over her face. “I’ll come.”

“What the *fuck* is wrong with you?” Knox all but bellowed as the little trio of three left the four to their own devices.

“What the fuck is wrong with *me*? What’s wrong with you?”

‘What?”

“Why are you so mad at me?”

“Because the mother of your fucking child is here and you’re acting like you’re fucking eight years old. Petulant.”

“Has it ever occurred to you that maybe I’m terrified that I’m going to be a fucking father?” The volcano had erupted and was splashing lava in its entire path. Gerard and Steven were trapped, casualties in the flames.

“If you were so fucking terrified you wouldn’t be acting like this. What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“What’s wrong with me? What’s wrong with me? Do you think I like singing your poetic songs about me every night?”

“Charlie, stop it.”

“No, tell me. Tell me.”

“Tell you what?”

“What’s wrong with me.”

“I don’t know! That’s why I’m asking you.”

“I don’t look at you like I’m in love with you.”

“*What*?”

“I don’t. You said that I did, this morning. I don’t do that.”

“Charlie! That’s *not* what this is about!”

“Then what’s it about? Everything always circles back to you.”

“It’s about how you are meeting the woman who is carrying your child, and you can’t even see straight. What is wrong with you?” Knox took a step closer to him, bridging their gap. He let his hands fix some of Charlie’s clothes, but Charlie swatted them off quite unsuccessfully.

“What’s wrong with me is that I had the worst fucking night of my entire life that night and a child got conceived out of it. I felt so bad that I wanted to kill myself. If I hadn’t been seeing her in the club, I would have probably done it. I made you cry. I made you fucking cry because I can’t stand the fucking feelings I have for you. They’re so

fucking overwhelming. And my dad had called me a few days before and I was just in such a bad fucking place. And I fucked it all up. Like I always do."

"Charlie,"

"Don't touch me, Knox. I fucked everything up. And now she's going to bring a baby into the world? I can't be a father to a baby. I can't even take care of myself. She shouldn't have my baby. It'll grow up to be rotten. It'll take and take and take until it can't anymore and then it'll get sick of itself. Just like me."

"You don't know that." Knox's breath has been kicked out of his chest. He couldn't breathe.

"Yes, I fucking do. I think we fucked like four times that night and I called her your name every single time." Charlie blew a stream of air out of his mouth, tears welling in his eyes. "So yeah. Yeah, Knox. I got myself all strung out, because I think if she wants any piece of my DNA, she shouldn't. I don't want to be a father because I can't be one. I'm a sorry excuse for a person. I'd be an even worse father."

A knock shifted the entire universe for the two. Meeks and Pitts were looking at each other like they'd seen a ghost, unsure of what to say or how to make an opinion on any of it. Todd opened the door after no one had responded, guiding Olivia back into the room.

"Hi, Charlie," She smiled at him. It was generous, a bit sad. The others got the memo. Knox was first to file out of the room, glad that Peter had gotten the groupies out of the hallway. He didn't want them listening to all of that. It was like the world was cracking with every step he took and he was falling closer to the center of the Earth. He gripped the edges of the sink, forcing himself to take deep breaths and focus on the cold water running on his wrists.

In the green room, Charlie was sitting across from Olivia as his leg bounced up and down, over and over again. He was so jittery that he could have thrown up.

“I really like you, Charlie.” She began, and somehow, Charlie felt like whatever she was going to tell him was going to ruin his life. “I love your band. Obviously. I told you that on New Years.”

“Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Thanks. Thanks a lot.”

“But you’re not the kind of guy I see myself falling in love with. I don’t know if I can see you mowing the yard and picking up the kids from school.”

“I wouldn’t.” He was surprised at the curtness of his own voice.

“I don’t know if I want to keep this baby.” She pulled out a sonogram photograph, showing him the four images that were stuck together. “I look at this little thing, and I just wonder if it’s worth it.”

“What?”

“I don’t know you, and you don’t know me. And I don’t love you, and you don’t love me. I want to have a baby, but I want it to be with someone I spend the rest of my life with.”

“That’s fine by me.”

“You’re really sort of an asshole, aren’t you?”

“I’m sorry.” Her words were like knives.

“The problem is, I look at these pictures, and I also think about how incredible it is that I’m growing a human being. I’ve created something that has a heart. Legs. Arms. It’s beautiful.” She smiled like she was going to cry. “The other problem is that I can’t get an abortion. It’s illegal.”

“I know.”

“You’re rich. You’re famous. I’m sure you don’t want it in any tabloids that you’ve got a kid on the way.”

“No.”

“Then you’ve got to help me. I don’t know where to get one. I don’t know what to do. I can’t afford one either.”

“I’m sure I could figure something out.”

“Well, you need to do it soon. This week.”

“Okay.”

“I’m surprised you’re so okay with this.”

“What?”

“I mean, it’s my decision to get rid of this baby. Not yours. And you’re a famous rockstar. And you’re a man.”

“So?”

“So you’re letting *me* make *my* decision. Maybe there’s somebody in there after all.”

“Not anymore.”

“No,” She shook her head, reaching out a hand to place it over his that had been drumming on his thigh since she’d arrived. “I think there is.”

“My friend, Todd. He’ll probably know somebody.”

“Yeah?” She smiled again. That smile that Charlie was sure was the reason he came up to her in the first place. It felt like she was hugging him.

“Yeah.”

“Good.”

“I’ll grab him.” Charlie got up almost immediately, feeling like he was sprinting for the door.

“And Charlie?” She looked at him again, in a way that felt like she was seeing right through him. “Thank you. For this. For letting me decide.”

“It’s your body. And it’s my fault anyways. It’s no problem.”

Chapter End Notes

charlieeeeeeeee

stumbling words that told you

Chapter Summary

Charlie gets Todd. Todd gets a girl.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Charlie exits the little room, he fumbles in his pocket a moment. He needs something to take the edge off of this horrible night. He'd felt electric onstage, trying to burn so brightly that he'd hopefully combust before he had to talk about raising a child. Now, it seemed he wasn't going to have to.

He found them all sitting on a couch out in the area that a lot of the people who had worked the event had been in earlier. Knox was on the couch, clearly arguing with Meeks and Pitts, who were questioning him as they stood in front of him. Cameron was talking quickly to Stick in the corner, and Neil and Todd were in the couch with Knox, watching the conversation before them happen.

"Todd?"

Charlie's entrance into the area had startled everyone. Peter was in the corner, smoking a cigarette.

"Can I talk to you?"

As soon as Todd stood, Neil stood too. It seemed that they always moved in a pair, always together. Knox stood too, but he didn't follow. Charlie couldn't look him in the eyes.

“What is it?”

“*Charlie*,” Cameron’s voice rang clear.

“Not now.” Charlie snapped at him, jittery and curt. He was a shell of himself.

“Charlie?” Todd looked at him carefully, unsure of what Charlie would want with him.

“We need to talk to you.”

“Uh, okay.”

Todd followed him back to the green room, finding Olivia sitting at the table inside. She was pretty. Todd knew that. He had never dated a woman, had never been with one, but he knew that by any standards, she was gorgeous. She had been very sweet when he and Neil had walked her around the little area, trying to speak loud enough to cover Charlie and Knox screaming at each other as Neil showed her snapshots.

When Todd sat down at the couch that was in the green room, across from Charlie, who sat with Olivia, Neil sat on the other end; not wanting to be so conspicuous. He knew that whatever was going on between the two, for him to be there, it couldn’t be good.

“What do you know about women’s lib?” Olivia began, and the start to the conversation threw Todd for such a loop that he guffawed.

“I’m sorry?”

“I want to get an abortion.”

“What?”

“Charlie said you could help me.”

“Like… I can… I’m sorry, what did I miss?”

“I talked to Charlie. I wanted to get an abortion the minute I heard I was pregnant. Well, maybe not the exact minute, but pretty soon after. I don’t want to have a baby. I’m not ready. I’m only twenty. I’m still in college.” She looked down at her feet after she had said it. Charlie was twenty five. College had been a long time ago, it felt.

“You’re in college?” Charlie turned to her.

“Yes.” She was still looking at the floor. “And I don’t typically go out and… well, do what I did on New Years. That’s why I knew it was your baby, Charlie. I don’t… I don’t typically sleep with guys at this point in my life right now. And besides,” She started talking fast, as if she was trying to cover up the last sentence. “I’m studying to be a doctor, and I have a lot more school left before I can even think about settling down.”

“*Fuck*,” Charlie shook his head, his leg and fingers tapping away again.

“So, you want me to do what?”

“They want you to call Ginny.” Neil supplied, “She knows somebody who can do it.”

Ginny Danbury was one of Todd’s oldest friends in the city. He’d been disgustingly poor before he’d met Cameron at a gay bar, and he’d given him a job. But Ginny Danbury was Todd’s oldest friend in the city. She was older than him by two years. She was a lesbian, she was tough, and she had gotten an abortion the week Todd had met her. She was always doing something illegally with her girlfriend, Chris. Technically, they were business partners. They owned a bakery. But during the night, they were taking guys who didn’t want to fight in Vietnam to Canada, setting girls up with a doctor they knew who would give the operation in Canada, handling everyone’s affairs and their own with ease and practice as if they were both fifty years old.

“Okay, yeah. Yeah. I know a girl.”

“Is it expensive?”

“I don’t know. I’ll have to call her.”

“I work at a diner. School nights and the weekends.” Olivia said, and Charlie wanted to throw up and simultaneously hold this woman in his arms and tell her how fucking sorry he was that he had practically ruined her life.

“There’s a payphone out by the bus. I’ll call her.” Todd said, and as he left, Neil got up and followed him.

“You don’t need to worry about how much it costs.” Charlie said, taking his packet of cigarettes out but letting them sit on the table. He needed something for his hands to touch. “I’ll pay for it. Any of it. All of it.”

“You don’t have to, but I can’t. At least, I don’t think I’ll be able to. I’m pretty sure I won’t be able to. Thank you.”

“And you flew out here?”

“Yes.”

“Send me your receipts for your flights. And I’ll pay for your hotel room. Where are you staying?”

“You don’t have to do that. It was my decision to come here.”

“Yes, I do. You’re twenty. You want to be a doctor. You work at a diner. I can’t ask you to do anything more than what you’re already here doing.”

“I really appreciate all of this.”

“I’m so fucking sorry. I can’t believe I’ve fucked your life up like this.” He shivers, although it isn’t cold in the green room. “I really, really fucked your life up. I’m so fucking sorry. I’m so sorry I was being such an asshole earlier. Fuck.”

“It’s okay,” She says, gives him that smile she always has. “You’ve

probably got a lot going on. Things I wouldn't understand."

"You do too. I'm sure you do."

She grins again, and then giggles a bit, despite it all. "There's always something happening. I'm in college."

"Do you want to tell me about it?"

She grins again, a little wider. Then, she launches into a complex story about a lot of people Charlie doesn't know. Classmates and whose dating whom and things of that sort. It reminds him of when he was in college. He feels infinitely older than her, even though he's only five years older. But, he sits and listens, because he wants to. Because he needs to.

"It's freezing out here." Neil says, blowing a stream of cold air out of his mouth.

"This is so crazy." Todd shakes his head, the door to the phone booth open so that Neil can share some space with him. "I can't believe she's only twenty."

"How'd she get into the club?"

"It was New Years."

"She was sweet."

“Yeah,” Todd punches the numbers to Ginny’s home phone in, hoping that she isn’t on some kind of excursion and that somebody will pick up.

It rings a few times, and Neil pulls his notebook out his breast pocket to doodle something.

“What?”

“I’ll tell you later.”

“This is Ginny.” Her voice is curt on the phone, like she has other business she needs to be attending to. She probably does. She’s involved in just about everything Todd can think of. Environmental causes, deforestation, the war, the Black Panther Party. She’s donating or taking people to and from just about every march or cause she can.

“Hey, Gin. This is Todd.” Ginny was Todd’s first friend in the city. They had met at one of Ginny’s favorite underground bars.

“Todd!” He could hear the smile in her voice, “What are you up to? Careening around America still with that band?”

“Yes, I am.”

“What are you calling for? Not that it’s not nice to hear from you.”

“Do you know somebody who can give an abortion?”

“What?”

“Do you know somebody that can give an abortion?”

“Did you get somebody knocked up? Did you break up with Neil? Todd, this is a lot of information for me to be giving you on what, a payphone?”

“What? Of course I didn’t! Neil’s right here.” Todd sighed, “Charlie got this girl pregnant. She wants to have an abortion. He wanted me to ask if I could find her one.”

“Well of course I can get her one. Which one is Charlie?”

“The lead singer.”

“Christ,” She sighed, “I know a guy. I take all the girls there. It’s safe. Really, really safe. It isn’t very expensive, but there’s a lot of traveling and that sort of thing. She’ll have to get a passport. Look, I’m sort of in the middle of something here. Can you call me tomorrow? Can you have her call me, actually? I’ll get everything set up. Don’t worry about any of it.”

In the green room, Charlie and Olivia were getting along quite well. Charlie was itching for something still, but the conversation was good. She was sweet. If he could have remembered anything about New Years except the fight, he was sure that they’d been able to have fun together.

“If you don’t mind me asking,” She shifted in her seat, “Why didn’t you call me Olivia while we were having sex?”

“Hm?” Charlie didn’t want to answer that.

“I had a great time, but I don’t think you remember any of it. Do you?”

“No. I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright actually. I had fun. You were very careful with me. Really attentive. Even while you were high out of your mind.”

Charlie feels his entire body settle after she’s said the words.

“I’m sorry you got pregnant.”

“We’re getting it figured out.” She said, “Was that Knox in here who you were yelling with?”

“Yes.”

“You talked about him a lot that night. Even if you weren’t saying his name.”

“He’s my best friend.”

“Yes,” She nodded, then licked her lips. “Well, you’re dynamite in the sack. Really.”

Charlie laughed despite himself.

“But really, I think there’s a good person in you. I thought that that night too, even though it was much hazier then. I think you’re a good guy, Charlie. But I think you should figure out all your feelings.”

Charlie wants to say something, anything, but he was rendered speechless from it all.

“If somebody loves you, you should take advantage of it. I know I would.”

Todd enters again without knocking, a piece of paper likely from Neil’s notebook with some numbers scrawled on it. The paper Neil was doodling on was in Todd's jacket pocket. It said *I love you*.

“This is Ginny. You can call her tonight. Tomorrow. When you’d like. She’s a friend of mine. She lives in New York City with her partner, Chris. They own a bakery there. That’s their day job, at least.” He handed her the paper, and she took it from him, holding it close to her.

“She sounds great.”

“She is.”

“Do you know her, Charlie?”

“No,” Charlie shook his head, “But if Todd does, I’m sure she’s fabulous.”

“She’s a genius.” Todd supplied, “I think people are getting ready to head back. We’re going to. But you can stay as long as you’d like. Both of you.”

“I’m getting tired.” Olivia said, “I’ll grab a cab back.”

“No,” Charlie shook his head, “I’ll take a cab with you. I’ll come with. I’ll pay for everything you had to this weekend.”

“Alright,” She stood, and the couple saw themselves out.

“I’ll tell Cameron I won’t be back until later.”

“Alright.”

Charlie left her in the room again, and just caught Cameron as the whole group of people headed to the tour bus.

“I won’t be back for awhile. I’m seeing her home.”

“Come back in one piece.” Is all Cameron says before he’s gone.

The next little while is messy. Incredibly so. There's flash photography and fans screaming at him and he's doing everything he can to just grab this girl and carefully put her in the cab. Then, when the mess is all over, she sighs next to him.

"I'm glad that isn't my life. I'm sorry."

"Yeah," Charlie lets her tell the cabbie her hotel's address, and they shoot away towards it.

It's a somewhat silent ride, small talk between the two. Charlie has decided he likes her. That he feels very, very poorly about the whole situation. They arrive at the hotel and she leads him to the front desk. There's an interview with the band playing on late night television when they enter. He pays for her room, gives her nearly $600 in cash, gives her his phone number, and they say their goodbyes.

Unexpectedly, as he turns to go (the cab's meter is still running), she hugs him tightly.

"Thank you, Charlie," Her voice is tight. "For all of it."

"I'll see you again." He says as they part ways.

She waves. He gets in the cab.

When he finally gets back to the hotel, he's dry swallowed two things that are in his pocket. They're both going to make him sleepy. He knows this. He arrives at the hotel to a gaggle of people, partying after the concert. He doesn't pay them any mind, and goes up to his room, not wanting to get sucked into anything other than a shower and his bed.

After he showers and throws on a pair of pajamas, he feels himself really relax for the first time in a few days. He drinks a glass of water, just in case anything got stuck on the way down when he was dry swallowing pills earlier.

The knock on the door is so faint he barely hears it. He knows who it is. He isn't sure he wants to get up and answer it, after the night he's had. But Charlie is only human, and Knox Overstreet is like a drug he just can't ever seem to kick. Even if they'd fought.

"I'm sorry I'm here." Knox is crying. He's starkly sober, and he's crying. "I should go. I should."

"Well you're here. Come in."

"I should go." He's shifting on his feet, back and forth.

"What's the matter?"

"You. Not you. But you."

Charlie just shakes his head, because he can't decipher that sort of thing right now.

“I’m sorry we got in a fight. I’m sorry I yelled at you.”

“I’m sorry too,” Charlie nods, a yawn escaping him. “I lost my temper. And with everything… I just feel like shit about myself.”

“Is everything going to be okay?”

They migrate to the bed. They don’t have to talk about it.

“Yeah,” Charlie nods, arranging the pillow behind him as he sits up next to Knox. “She’s going to get an abortion, actually. She wants to get one, and Todd knows somebody.”

“Oh,” Knox shakes his head, wiping some tears off of his face. “Well that’s good then, that she’s getting what she needs. What she wants.”

“Yes. I’m taking care of all of the payments and whatever else she needs.”

“Good.”

It’s silent a beat too long.

“Why are you here?”

“I couldn’t sleep.” Knox says, his eyes mostly drying up.

“Me?”

“It’s always you.”

Charlie sighs, letting his eyes linger over Knox in the darkness of the hotel room.

“Do you want to sleep here tonight?”

“Yeah,” Knox nods, lying down as Charlie does, slotting himself into Charlie’s arms.

It feels like home.

“You shouldn’t care about me as much as you do, Knox.” Charlie says, his lips murmuring the words so softly that Knox barely hears him.

“I shouldn’t,” Knox agrees, “But I do.”

“I”m sorry.”

“It’s alright.” Knox hasn’t slept with Charlie like this since high school. They haven’t just slept together, just to sleep, in a very long time. “I’m not perfect either.”

“Well you’re pretty damn close.” Charlie kisses Knox’s forehead and

pulls him infinitely closer. He isn't sure if there's ever a gap between them when they sleep. He thinks back to Olivia's words as Knox stills against him, his fingers knotted into Charlie's shirt. *If somebody loves you, you should take advantage of it*. He tries to make sense of it all, but his pills are making him drift off into to a deep, deep sleep.

Chapter End Notes

happy holidays my dear readers xoxoxoxo

god knows when, but you're doing it again

Chapter Summary

Band meeting. Charlie isn't invited.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s a few weeks later that Knox finds himself in Stick’s office, looking at the various books in the back and different knick knacks he has in his office. He has a lot of things on his desk, but the photo frame is long gone. Knox wonders if it had ever really meant anything at all.

“Thanks for coming in today.”

Meeks looks around at the little rag tag group and shakes his head. “Where’s Charlie?”

“We didn’t call him.”

“But this is a band meeting.”

“It’s about Charlie, isn’t it?” Knox says, not looking up at Stick. He doesn’t need to to understand what the meeting is for. What it’s about. Knox knows without saying anything else.

“I think he needs to take a break.”

“We all do,” Meeks agrees, “Shouldn’t he be here, though?”

“He’s sick, Steve.”

“I know.” Meeks’s voice is soft, mangled. Meeks doesn’t want to say that it’s so painful for him to see the ghost of his old best friend that he sometimes he can’t get out of bed in the morning.

“He needs to go to rehab.” Knox agrees, “He just keeps getting worse. And every time I think he’s getting better, he isn’t.”

“Do you know what he’s doing?” Stick asks, because they all know that Knox is the only one who would know.

“Of course I don’t.”

“You know him best.”

“You’re just asking me that because I sleep with him.”

“You don’t anymore, do you?”

“No,” Knox shakes his head, “We ended all of that around New Years. Well, we tried to.”

“What’s the answer, Knox?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you think he needs help?”

“Yeah,” Knox nods, but there’s something bubbling at the surface. Everyone can see that. “He just… I don’t know if it’s going to help him right now. He’s got a really bad relationship with his dad right now, probably the worst its ever been. And then the whole thing with Olivia that happened… I don’t know if we can do anything.”

“What happened with Olivia?”

“We told you.”

“Yeah, but not the details.”

“Right.” Knox sighs, “The details.”

It’s too cold for early March. He had spent the better part of the day trying to talk himself out of what was sure to be a coma, with all the stress he had been under. Charlie had been holed up at his place for the last week in a drunken stupor, and during that time, he had really, really disliked this shell of a person Charlie had become.

First of all, Charlie had his own place. It was a gorgeous place too. High ceilings and lush carpet and bright hardwood floors and rent that was surely higher than Knox could imagine. They made so much money, they weren’t really sure what to do with it all anymore. Knox’s place was different. Homier, smaller.

The place that Knox had loved was suddenly a wasteland, Charlie on the couch and Charlie in his bed and Charlie, Charlie, Charlie. Knox loved him. He did. He loved him so, so much that when he thought about his life, and the rest of it was stretched out before him like a time line, he knew that he'd repeat the same mistake each time. He'd ask Charlie to sleep with him in every lifetime, even though there was the distance now. The fights and the sleepless nights and the rolling around of the subject. He would do it again and again and again, but this time, if he ever had a second chance at life, this time he would say he loved him that first night.

Charlie was lying next to him on the couch. Knox expected that he was going to leave soon. The pills that he took were running out, Knox didn't keep much liquor in the house, and he certainly wasn't going to find any weed around. Knox kept pretty sober when he wasn't on the road, and even then, he was pretty much out of the spotlight a lot of the time.

Charlie wanted to spend the night when Olivia had called about all the finalities of everything. Charlie hadn't left since that night, which was a week ago. Tomorrow, Ginny was going to pick her up from their hotel they were staying in and they were going to drive out with Olivia's younger sister to the place in Canada. She wanted to have her along as a support person, and everybody involved in the little affair had agreed that it was grand idea. Charlie had sent more than enough money, and now he was just waiting around for a call.

"Should I go with her?'

"Charlie," Knox felt flummoxed by it all. This was the fiftieth time he had asked in the last week. "I don't know. If you want to go, go."

"Well, what if it was you?"

“What?”

“If it was you, would you want me to come?”

“You sound *crazy*.” Knox shook his head, hand bunched up in his hair as he tried to write lyrics about anything other than the boy who was sitting six feet from him.

“Would you want me to come?” Charlie pressed on, not bothering to give up the point.

“That would be a different situation. So I don’t know.”

“How is it different? Just be honest. If you could have a baby would you want me there or not?”

“Oh my god, what are you having!” Knox huffed, the song underneath him going absolutely nowhere. “Even if I could have a kid, *which I can’t!* I’d want you there with me.”

“Okay. So you think I should go to Canada on a red-eye tonight.”

“No!”

“Well what are you saying I should do?”

“I would want you there because you’re my friend. She doesn’t know you as well as I do.”

“But if she did?”

“Then yes, I’d take the red-eye. If I was you.”

“Okay, so I should call the airport, right?"

“No!” Knox groaned, “Just watch the television for a little while, alright? I’m trying to write a song.”

“Alright,” Charlie nods, and then silence overtakes them again. The television is playing a news program, and it’s about the war. It’s terrible. Knox finds himself watching intently, although he hasn’t really watched the news in months. It seems as though the world is falling apart. Charlie gets up and turns it off, poking around at Knox’s record player instead.

“You have anything new?”

“Whatever I have will be in the box,” Knox says, looking at his stanzas and lines, trying to make sense of any of them. Paul McCartney never has these problems. He’s sure of it.

“This is still new, yeah?” Charlie holds something up, but he doesn’t have time to look before Charlie’s messy movements are placing a record on the player.

It's Bridge Over Troubled Water. Knox had bought it the day it came out. It's still new by about a month or so. It's also one of the main reasons that they can't sell anything new. Because despite how famous and rich their band is becoming, they're never going to have a number one hit. And with this song blaring through the apartment with its rich harmonies and insane vocals, Knox doesn't know if they ever will have a number one hit. It's too hard. Way too much pressure.

"You think they're going to go solo?"

"What?"

Charlie points to the record player.

"Oh, I don't know." He shrugs, "Probably." He switches to a pencil, hoping that maybe it will bring him more luck. The potential to erase, instead of cross out.

The song switches. The silence for the moment feels weighted.

"Is there something you want to talk about?"

"Like what?"

"I don't know. You seem like you want to tell me something."

"Not really."

“Yeah?” Knox knows he’s lying.

“I don’t know.”

“What is it?”

“Do you think I’m a bad person?”

“Of course I don’t think that.”

“Do you think we’re going to break up?”

“Us?”

“The band.”

“Well, Stick says that just about every big group right now is over, even if they haven’t said anything.”

“I know. Do you think we’re going to break up?”

“Everybody does eventually. But it’s fun now. It’s good right now.”

“I gave Olivia your phone number,” Charlie changes the subject so quickly that Knox nearly gets whiplash from it. “I told her I would probably be here for most of the week.”

“Why are you here? If you don’t mind me asking, I guess.”

“I don’t want to be alone.”

Knox hums in response. There’s not much else he has to say.

The music is loud. Brass sections and wailing. It’s making it hard to work. But Charlie seems to be enjoying himself, tapping along or singing the words. Knox watches him, lets the vision before him play around in his head a little bit. Maybe a little too long. And then he finds something.

“You think you’re going to write us a number one hit?”

“I don’t know.” Knox says, writing down the thoughts erupting in his head.

“I know you will. And even if you don’t, I think they’re all number one.”

Knox smiles at him, because of course he does. The night turns into the early hours of the morning and then he wakes up sometime around noon the next day, Charlie’s arms wrapped around him. They wake up and it doesn’t take long for Charlie to start kissing him, and then they’re taking a shower together and Knox wonders if he has the energy to do this anymore. He wonders if they’re going to run themselves straight into the ground. Charlie is mostly sober when they stumble out to make breakfast (or is it lunch?) while they kiss and then Knox’s phone starts ringing.

“Probably for me,” Charlie says, pulling away from Knox’s sweet pink lips. “Charlie!” He answers.

“Charlie?” It’s Olivia. “Hi!”

“Hello! How are you?”

“I’m good. Really good. I feel just fine. Ginny booked us a really nice hotel room, actually. I think you’d really approve of it, and you should, since it’s your money.”

“You’re comfortable?”

“Yes, definitely. We drove out awhile this morning to get there, since it was at 8 in the morning, but it was great. The doctor was really, really nice. So were all of the nurses.”

“What was the doctor’s name?”

“John Keating.”

“Sounds poetic,”

“He seemed like it. He was really, really great, Charlie. I almost wished you’d been with me to meet him. He was so kind. So careful. So caring. He didn’t care why I wanted to get one. He just wanted me to be able to have access to what I was choosing. Oh, Charlie, he was brilliant.”

“That’s wonderful.”

“I wanted to thank you for taking care of all of this. Really. It means so much to me. Ginny is just great. I had no idea Chris was a woman until I met them, but they were so wonderful. I think I’ve really made some friends in them.” She laughed, “I don’t know if that’s optimistic of me to say. I’ve known them for about two weeks.”

“No,” Charlie shook his head, watching as Knox danced around the kitchen to a record he’d put on. It was the same one as last night. Nobody had bothered to change it. Charlie knew he was trying to avoid seeming like he was listening. “When you know, you know.”

“Yes, I thought you might feel that way. I’m really glad I met you, Charlie. Everything you’ve done for me, the past few weeks, it’s really meant a lot.”

“It’s no problem. Really.”

“It feels colossal.”

“Are you okay?”

“I’m great. I might have some pain, but nothing abnormal. I feel good.”

“Good.”

“I feel free.” She sighed, “Like I’ve got my life back in my hands again.”

“I’m glad it went so smoothly for you.” Charlie wants to say something else, but he’s at a loss for words. “I’m sorry, again. For everything.”

“No apology necessary. It’s all over now.”

“You have more than enough, right? You have enough for everything?”

“You sent me so much money, I’ll be swimming in it. The hotel has two pools.”

“I wanted the best for you.”

“You’re a good guy, Charlie.” She took a breath, “Look, if I’m in town, and if you’re feeling whole again, call me up. I’d be happy to be your friend sometime.”

“Alright.” Charlie knows that this isn’t goodbye. He doesn’t know if he’ll be able to let a relationship like the one he’s formed with her go. “Goodbye.”

“Bye, Charlie.”

“Everything go okay?” Knox asks, flipping the eggs.

“Yeah. Yeah. She said it went really well. The doctor was great.”

“Good.”

Charlie’s got a headache that’s pounding into his skull. He’d been free of all his vices (except the one he really can't kick) for too many hours. It was pounding and aching in his skull.

“One egg or two?” Knox asks, still busy at the stove.

Charlie comes up behind him and puts his arms around him, kisses him on the neck. Knox is just tall enough that he can’t quite get his cheek without straining a bit.

“*Charlie*,” Knox sets the spatula down and turns to him.

“What?”

“What’s been going on?”

“What?”

“Are you okay?” He turns back to the eggs, and Charlie snakes back around him. “And don’t give me a half-assed answer. I want you to tell me the truth.”

“I’m just so stressed out.”

“I know you are.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. Just, Olivia. And my dad. It’s been really bad.”

“What did you fight with your dad about?” Knox remembers the previous Thanksgiving. Hushed moments and stolen kisses, but with their new found fame, Charlie’s father had been the most supportive Knox had ever seen him, and Knox had known him a long, long time.

“It’s a lot of different stuff.”

“Like what?” Knox pulls a plate out, and then he’s plating things, getting to work on Charlie’s request. He’d held up two fingers. “I can’t help you if you don’t tell me anything.”

“I just can’t tell you about what it’s all about.” Charlie’s arms aren’t around him anymore. He’s sitting on the counter now, watching Knox carefully.

“Why?”

“It’s a lot of different things.”

“The band?”

“The band. My press. Olivia. You. Lots and lots of you.”

“*Oh,*” Knox feels like the air has been kicked out his lungs. “What did you tell him about me?”

“That you’re my best friend.”

“Right,” Knox nods, and he decides he needs to drop the subject. Charlie’s father had pretty conservative views on the world, and he wasn’t sure that anything else was going to be revealed.

“It’s just really bad right now. It’s the worst it’s ever been. Ever.”

Knox relies most of the story, save a few bits here and there, to the little crew. He even goes back to cover New Years and all the in between bits for Stick and Cameron. Meeks and Pitts too, since they hadn't been around that much. He has no idea how much or how little they know. Meeks looks like he’s crying, and Stick just sits there, a frown on his face.

“What happened after that?”

“He got really drunk and took a bunch of pills. I haven’t seen him since. He left my house.” It was nearly April now.

“Do you think you could talk him into going to rehab?”

“Yes.”

“I think so too. I think you could talk him into just about anything.” Stick drums a pen on the table, up and down, up and down.

“I think you should do it, Knox.” Meeks says, tears in his eyes. “I haven’t seen my best friend in so long.” That hits Knox right in the chest, and pretty soon, he’s tearing up too.

“I’ll take him,” Knox says, and then the three remaining members of their little band are crying together, holding one another in Stick’s office.

“We’ll get him back. We will.” Pitts says, because he doesn’t know if he can say anything else.

Chapter End Notes

maybe I will let them admit it soon because I'm getting sick of myself!!!!! also thank you all so much for the comments on this ohhh my. so sweet. I have more knowledge about music stats in 1970 then people who were alive then so embarrassing..

you're coming home soon

Chapter Summary

Knox takes Charlie on a trip.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's a long, long two months before Knox has any courage to show up at Charlie's place. He can't seem to stomach it. The flowers he's holding in his hand are pathetic. They're going to sit in Charlie's kitchen, wither away, and die.

"Hi?" Charlie answers the door, a look on his face that is far away.

"Hi," Knox replies, looking him up and down. He hasn't seen him in nearly two months, and he isn't sure that Charlie's got any idea why he's here. He had meant to come sooner, to call or send a message even, but the fear of taking Charlie was choking him. It was rare that the two could get anything productive done, and Knox had asked both Steven and Gerard for advice.

They really didn't have much, and Neil and Todd were practically unreachable. They had been gallivanting in Amsterdam for the past two months, on a honeymoon of some sorts. They were always quite disgustingly happy. Neil was doing some fashion photography there, and they'd just stayed, writing and lounging and doing whatever else they got into together.

Knox had been writing a lot himself as of late. Poems that didn't feel grand enough to be songs and words that didn't feel grand enough to be poems. He'd written about four songs that seemed just good enough, but he was still searching hopelessly for that number one hit. The Beatles were releasing a record soon, so it seemed as though there was no hope for them.

“Knox?”

“Sorry,” Knox shook his head, watching Charlie carefully. “Can I come in?”

“Of course.”

Knox shuffled in, not bothering to kick off his shoes.

“I wasn’t expecting any visitors.”

“I know.”

“What brings you here?”

Knox sits at the table he knows well. “You.”

“Hm?”

“We had a meeting. The band did. About two months ago.”

“No invitation?” Charlie smirks, lights up a cigarette.

“No.” It’s the first time Knox has really felt like he’s taking charge. Or

trying to, that is. “We didn’t want you there because it was about you.”

“What?” He sees the confusion pass over Charlie’s eyes, though they’re blurry.

“Can I have a glass of water? Juice? Anything?” Knox asks, because he already feels like he’s sweating.

“Whatever you’d like is in the fridge.” Charlie nods over to it, but his gaze doesn’t leave Knox. “What was the meeting about?”

Suddenly parched, Knox opens the refrigerator door and drags a glass out of the cabinet he knows they’re in. He’s drinking the water like his life depends on it. As he closes the door, he sees a note hanging to the fridge with a photo of Olivia. The caption was simple. She was dressed for a night out with her friends, and a few of them were all posed together. *I’M PASSING ORGANIC CHEMISTRY! Love, Olivia. Xoxo.*

“Why are you here?”

Knox looks at the fridge, looks at Charlie, looks at the state of his apartment, and bites the bullet. He never even explained the flowers that are sitting on his table. Knox looks at him, the cigarette smoke swirling around his head. He’s paying for his rehab. Nobody had asked him to, but he was going to. If they were going to force him to go, Knox wasn’t going to make him pay for it himself. Any of them could have afforded it.

“I’m taking you to rehab.”

“W-what?” Charlie stammered, his eyes widening. “*What*?”

“I’m here to take you to rehab.”

Charlie snuffed out his cigarette, then focused his eyes back on Knox, who was holding the glass so tightly he was sure it was going to break. He was panting. His heart rate was speeding up like a racehorse.

“Were you going to ask me if I wanted to go, or were you just going to take me?”

“I was going to ask you. I was going to take you.”

“You think I need to go to rehab?”

“Yes.” Knox has been preparing his speech for weeks. The pills, the drinking, the stuff that he’s seen him snort. It’s been getting worse and worse for months, and he barely looks like himself anymore. Knox isn’t sure he’s even talking to Charlie.

“Okay.”

“What?” The speech was gone. Charlie didn’t look like he was going to fight him on it. He almost looked like he was going to cry.

“Okay.”

“What?”

“If you think I need to go to rehab, take me.”

“*Charlie*?”

“What?”

“You’re just… you're making this easy.”

“What were you expecting?”

“For us to fight. To scream at each other.”

“I don’t want to fight with you.”

“Okay,” Knox breathes through his nose, but he’s still on edge. He’s picked out a really nice place. It has a pool. He remembered how much Charlie liked to swim in the ocean when he was a kid, and it took no other convincing. “I brought you flowers.”

“Do I need to pack my stuff?”

“Yeah,” Knox nods, he isn’t sure what he really needs. Some clothes. Maybe his tooth brush. They’re used to life on the road, so it shouldn’t be too hard for him to decipher what he thinks he needs.

Knox looks at his meager kitchen. He barely had any food in the fridge, and he's got alcohol sitting around the place. There's another picture hanging from his fridge. It's from their high school graduation. Smiling with their arms around each other. Too much love and not enough place to put it. He hums to himself, a song he hasn't thought of in awhile, but one that Charlie had loved in high school. Elvis' Hound Dog. He pulls out his notebook and pencils in *too much love & not enough places 2 put it.*

"Ready," Charlie says, a small suitcase at his side.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

It's too easy. It's way too easy.

"You taking me someplace nice, Knoxie?" Charlie lights another cigarette as he gets into Knox's car.

"Of course. I'm paying for the nicest rehab facility in the country for you."

"You don't like me anymore, do you?"

"Of course I do." The flowers are back at Charlie's. They're going to wither up and die. "I have always, always liked you. Ever since I've known you. But I don't like who you've become anymore."

“Do you mean that?” Charlie shakes his head, blowing the smoke out of the car’s window. “Are we saying what we mean now?”

“I would never lie to you.”

Charlie turns the radio on, and the song is from their latest album. Charlie’s singing about melancholic love and why he can’t go on. “So we’re being honest now, then?” He turns it off, not wanting to listen to himself wail. “About it all?”

“I mean, you’re destroying yourself, Charlie. You’re a shell of who you were when we started the band. I know smoking a little when you’re drunk doesn’t always count, I can forgive that, but what you’re doing isn’t healthy. It hasn’t been healthy for months. And you can’t seem to kick it. You’re always so hazy now. Don’t you feel that?”

“Of course I fucking feel it, Knox.”

“I’m being honest with you. That’s what you asked of me.”

“I know.” Charlie shifts, “So you’re taking me to some hot shot place, then?”

“It’s the best there is.” He shakes his head, “I want you to get well.”

“I’m sorry you all felt you had to have a meeting without me. To talk about it.”

“We didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know what to do.”

“Were you scared to talk to me?”

The clinic is outside of the city, about an hour or so, given the traffic. Knox knows the route well. He’s visited four times in the last year or so, when Charlie would wake up and call him with a drunken verve in his voice or when Charlie wouldn’t speak to him for weeks on end.

He wanted to say something else, like that he wanted him to get well because he loved him. Or because he thought that without him, he wouldn’t have survived the first few years of his adolescent life. He wanted to say a myriad of things, but nothing felt good enough. He wanted to say a whole slew of beautiful, disjointed words of love. But even with the sincerity of the moment, he felt that it wasn’t the right time. He couldn’t tell him like this.

“Thanks for taking me,” Charlie says, blowing his smoke out of the window, forgiving Knox's silence. “I can’t figure it all out. So, it’s been getting worse and worse.”

“What can’t you figure out?” Knox huffs, “I’m sorry. It must feel like I’m ambushing you. I can come and take care of your place.”

“You’re not ambushing me. You want me to get better. Right?”

“Yeah,” Knox nods, “Yes. Yes, yes, yes. I want you to. So badly.”

Charlie has a headache. From last night’s hangover. Or from the night before. Or maybe it was the drugs he took when he was at Peter’s place four nights ago. Or maybe it was the residuals of the pills he was running out of. The pills that came in droves and droves and he couldn’t seem to stop buying them. His fingers were shaking as he lit

another cigarette. He had been chainsmoking since Knox had come into his apartment.

He thinks about their relationship. About how if Knox hadn't put the flowers on his kitchen table and sweated so much while he was drinking that glass of water pointing all signs to the fact that something was wrong, Charlie would have done what he always seemed to do, which inevitably would make him drink himself into oblivion and take pill after pill. He would have asked Knox to spend the night. He almost wished he was spending his night underneath or on top of the boy next to him, instead of winding down the road to rehab.

The idea was terrifying to him. He had been sick for months now. He knew he was sick, had been told so by the girls and the boys and Knox and his father and everybody else he had come into contact with as of late. Even Peter, the band's known drug-fueled guy, had said he needed help. And in the back of his mind, Charlie knew he did. Knox hadn't looked at him the same way he used to in months. Meeks was so cautious with him that he barely spoke to him, and the first time Charlie had been to his father's house without someone else, it had been a typhoon of why his life choices were all the wrong ones.

Of course, the fight with his father was and had been pouring into Charlie's mind at practically every single moment of his days. He was angry. He had been honest, with his father, and with himself, for the first time in his entire life. He tried not to think about it too much, but just thinking of the scene brought tears to his eyes. He flicked on the radio again, and thankfully it wasn't his voice that was singing back at him.

He knew that Knox likely wanted to talk about it, to apologize, to pardon himself for the care he was doing, even if Knox wasn't really sorry about it. But Charlie needed the silence, thinking that if there were any words in the car, he'd likely choke on them and drown.

It wasn't any special weekend. Charlie had decided to come home, for reasons unbeknownst to him. He wanted to show his parents that he was more than just a rockstar. If that could be something that they would ever care to see.

The fight started strong, after a dinner prepared by whatever chef that had escaped the wrath of being fired that Charlie's mother so often inflicted upon the poor souls that were hired at the Dalton estate. They'd been in the middle of a fight about Olivia when it had all really gone down hill.

"So now you're getting girls who have futures pregnant?"

"She's not having the baby! I told you that!"

"You know that abortion is wrong. We didn't raise you that way."

"I don't want to be a father! But that's not the point. *She* doesn't want to be a mother! That's the whole fucking point!"

"So what else are you doing? You look like fucking hell."

"Aren't you proud of me?" He's exasperated. "I'm the lead singer of one of the biggest bands in America, Dad. I make more money that I know what to do with. People love me."

"You don't write the songs, do you?"

“No, why?”

“They’re quite queer, don’t you think? I don’t like your music.”

“I think it’s poetry. Knox writes them all. Almost. Sometimes Steven writes one or two.”

“So Knox is writing queer music now? I’m sure his folks wouldn’t be happy to hear that.”

“I don’t know what they think, and I don’t care! He’s writing poetry, Dad.”

“I suppose you’d say so. He’s been your friend so long and all. You have to stop this fantasy that you’re still in high school, Charlie. Read between the lines with Knox. He likely isn’t the boy you grew up with anymore.”

“Yes he is.”

“No, I don’t think so. When you brought him for Thanksgiving, he was very strange. The strangest I’ve ever seen him.”

“He was his usual self.”

“I don’t want to talk about it any more. When are you going to quit and go back to banking? Or go to law school? Or have all those drugs you done ruined whatever brain cells you have left?’

“The band isn’t breaking up. Knox is still cranking out material for us. We’re composing it together.”

“Don’t talk about him.”

“What? He’s my best friend!”

“I know. I know that. I didn’t like his behavior over the holidays.”

“What did he do?”

“Nothing in particular. I’ve said that. I just don’t like him or what he’s become anymore.”

“How can you say that? You don’t even know him anymore.”

“I don’t have to.” He shrugged, "I think he's probably a fag. Don't you?"

“I love him, Dad.” Charlie didn’t know where it had come from, and then he couldn’t stop it. It was like an avalanche and Charlie and his dad were the unlucky pair skiing along the mountainside, trapped in all the snow. “I love him. He’s the only person who has ever, ever paid attention to me. He’s the only person that actually loves me back. He takes care of me and he treats me like I’m somebody that deserves to be loved. He taught me how to love. I never learned any of it from you or Mom.”

“No, no, no. *No you don’t.*”

“Yes, I do.”

“No, you don’t. My son, my only son, will not be one of those.”

“I like girls too, Dad. So does Knox."

"You can't do that."

"Yes, I can."

"I hope Knox doesn't have some fantasy you'll end up together."

"Knox doesn’t even know I feel this way about him.”

“Good. Don’t ever tell him. And if you bring this up to me again, I won’t ever see you again.”

The fight, as theirs often did, sizzled out when they both got tired of screeching at each other. Now, it was the only thing that Charlie could replay in his mind as Knox drove silently to their inevitable destination.

“You okay over there?”

“No.”

“Can I do anything?”

“No.”

“I’m sorry I’ve been so distant. I know you’ve been fighting with your parents.”

“Yeah,” Charlie shifts, throws his cigarette stub out of the window.

“Visiting days are Sunday. I should be available to come to every one. I’ve cleared my schedule.”

“You did?”

“Of course. I’d do anything you needed of me. I think you’ll need a familiar face while you’re there.”

Charlie lets that sit in his brain. Wonders if he should just bite the bullet and say the three little words before he gets dropped into the pit of the beast. He knows he shouldn’t. Knox wouldn’t say it back. Charlie knows, deep down, that Knox won’t say it back until he gets sober.

“I really want this to work for you, Charlie.”

“How long is it?”

“It’s three months. More if you need it.”

“What about the band?”

“It’s no problem. We want you to get better. We’re taking a hiatus until further notice. I’m still going to write, but we aren’t going to do anything professionally until you’re well again, and even then, it’s when you want to go back to it.”

“Really?”

“It wasn’t something we had to think about. It’s what we want to do. What we’re going to do.”

Charlie hums and he looks back out the window. It’s a grey day, and it’s likely going to rain at some point. But for now, the skies aren’t showing any signs. It’s just the melancholiness of it all, edging into his mood. He hadn’t woken up feeling very well, and it seemed that he was just going to be feeling worse and worse.

The rest of the trek to the facility isn’t worth much. Talking about traffic, the radio, trivial things that they wouldn’t normally engage in. They were cordial with each other, too nice, even, as they neared the facility. Knox had a bag with him, likely with some papers or whatever they needed. Charlie knew that any questions they had, Knox had already taken care of it. Taken care of him.

As Knox parked, reaching back to rummage with things, finding a pen, running a hand through his hair, Charlie let himself watch, allowing

the itch for his fifth (or was it sixth?) cigarette to subside, if only for a moment.

“I guess we’ll go get you checked in, then.” Knox said, looking at the bright building in front of them. It looked sprawling, clean, and nice.

They shuffle out of the car, Charlie with a measly bag and Knox with his own. They look like quite a pair. Two rockstars. Two old friends. One carrying his papers, one carrying his luggage, awaiting an end to which he can’t envision now.

“You ready?” Knox asks, adjusting his jacket.

“Yeah,” Charlie nods, looking up at the place.

Knox pulls him into an unexpected hug. The luggage and bags make it all awkward. Charlie holds on anyways, despite it all. “You’re gonna be great. You’re gonna get well.” It’s the last real thing he says before they are instructed to *please wait over there*.

Chapter End Notes

sorry in advance my guys...

you can hear him and see him

Chapter Summary

1971. Knox gets that number one hit.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a year before they decided to embark on anything else in the band. Knox had been writing nearly nonstop since that day he'd dropped Charlie off at rehab, and things really seemed like they were clearing up for him. Knox had an okay relationship with his parents for what felt like the first time in his life, Charlie was looking better every Sunday, and as the year rolled on and by, it felt like maybe they were going to be okay.

So, once Charlie got out, and they'd had a wonderful little party at half of the band's flat, they decided to talk about making an album again. It was after Neil and Todd had left, happy to ride the subway back to their own little place.

Of course, the discussion about music was exciting to everybody. They were a little older, a lot wiser, and they were finally, finally getting to the point in their lives where they could all be friends again. The ideas led to the next, and it wasn't long before they had enough material to make another album.

So, with the ideas brimming, they foraged on in making it. Cameron and Stick were more than happy to finally be working with their most promising band again, and Neil was happy to take their photographs and submit them to any publication and get the excitement of their album started. Once they began, it was a very fast process.

Neil had been more than happy to pick up the jobs because recently, he and Todd had been doing just about every odd little job to make

ends meet. He was doing odd jobs here and there, selling photos and keeping his head just above water for the both of them while Todd tried to sell his poetry. It was going pretty well. He'd been written to by Ginsberg.

The album went very quickly. Cameron was so fast in getting everything figured out that the album had been finished in just under three months. The subsequent move to get publicity worked well too. Interviews and photographs and the four of them smiling and happy, and for once it seemed, all healthy.

Knox was practically in heaven. The album was full of angsty, mad, and love sick songs. Which were brought on by a myriad of things. The war, the times that were changing, the political atmosphere, his life, Charlie, his childhood. It was probably some of his best writing, and he was really, really proud of it. It seemed that everyone around him was pretty proud of it too.

The press turned into the singles and the singles eventually gave way to the album, which gave Knox what he had always been wanting. It was a dreary sort of morning when he woke up to the phone call.

"Hello?" The album launch party had been a lot for him. It was the first time he'd had anything to drink in a long, long time, and he'd had a good, pretty normal time. Charlie had nursed his water all night.

"Knox, baby," Charlie's voice sounded well adjusted, like he'd been up for hours and hours. "I checked the charts."

"Yeah?"

"Your song is number one." Charlie hollered with a yawp so loudly

into the phone that Knox had to pull it away from his face.

"What?" Knox felt like he was going to pass out. "Are you fucking with me right now?"

"They just announced it on the radio! Turn it on before you miss it!"

Knox ran over to his radio, fumbling with the button as he ran to turn it on. As Charlie had said, his partner's voice was singing on the radio, the music swelling around him.

"Holy shit. Holy shit!"

"I know! Oh my god, I hope John Lennon knows you're coming for his fucking job!"

"Oh my god. This is so crazy."

"I think you're gonna win the fucking Grammy. Holy shit! Holy shit, Knox!"

"It's great, Charlie, yeah! *Wow*." Knox sits in silence a moment, just listening to the radio play on and on. It feels better than he would ever say out loud. He is so happy about it, it felt as though his heart could burst.

"And Cameron called too. He's thinking a tour of Europe. For late this year, early next year."

“Sounds fucking great to me.” Knox could have cried. “Thanks for calling me, Charlie.”

“Anytime. I should go.”

“Me too. I should probably get up and do something today.” Knox agrees, although it seems as though neither of them want to hang up the phone.

“I’m so proud of you, Knox.”

“Thank you,” Knox whispers, feeling like he’s 14 all over again, blushing at a compliment from his roommate.

I like that color on you, Knox.

It’s just school issued.

It’s always looked good on you.

He lets that thought go as they both breathe into the receiver, hoping that the other will say goodbye first. Knox wants to forget about the stupid, horrible, overtaking crush that he has on the boy he’s talking to. Even at his worst, and certainly at his best, Knox has always, always loved him. Through all of it.

“I should go. See you soon.”

“See ya,” Knox answers, and then he’s off to lie in bed, likely answer more phone calls, and bask in the excitement all day. He almost feels like flying around the city all day just to see their record in the store.

Instead, he sits and thinks about another tour. The one to Europe. He knows that another tour is probably not what they need right now, so he’s happy to hear that they still need to do some planning and things of that sort. They still need time before they get back out to what destroyed them all in the first place.

In their shared apartment, that was finally, finally one, Cameron smiled widely at Stick, who had been answering their phone all morning. Their phone. Their apartment. Their space. It was so exciting that Cameron wasn’t sure he was ever going to shut up about it. Namely, he was mostly overjoyed by how quickly Stick had gotten rid of the other apartment that they owned. The apartment that Knox had slept in that one night. They had neighbors now.

“I’m so proud of you,” Stick says, finally putting down the phone to rest next to Cameron on the couch. “We’ve got the number one record in the nation. And that was all you.”

“It wasn’t *all* me.”

“Yes, it was. You took a chance on Charlie and his ragtag little group.”

“Yeah, but I think they would have probably made it whether they had me or they didn’t.”

“They’re brilliant. You’ve always picked good things, good artists. You always know what to do, even when you have the worst jobs in the office.”

“Woodstock,” Cameron huffed out a laugh.

“Yeah,” He nodded, threading his fingers with Cameron’s own. “Exactly. But you don’t let it bother you. You don’t let any of it bother you. That’s why I think you need to be promoted.”

“Aren’t you in charge of me?”

“In a way, yes.”

“In a way,” Cameron laughed, “You’re literally my boss.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know.”

“So you’re going to promote me?”

“Well, I’m probably going to be the head executive in a few months. Miller is retiring. So, if you’d like to, I want you to be my co-head executive. If you want,” He stood up, rifling with his knapsack, “I can even make us partners.” He pulled out a file, and walked back to the couch. He adjusted his glasses, looking carefully at the man he was so in love with next to him.

“Are you…”

“Yes.”

“Official, paperwork partners.”

“Official, paperwork partners. Cameron and Johnson. Rich, I-” He wanted to say something, anything else, but he couldn’t. The words got caught up in his throat.

“Are you asking me what I think you are?”

“Yes. We lost so much time because of me, and all my internal stuff. I just want to make you happy all of the time. After Knox came here that one time, I just don’t ever want you to feel that way again. Ever. So I want us to be partners, professionally. We’ll be partners at work, but you’ll own half of my life, and I’ll own half of yours. It's the only way we can really get married legally.”

“I love you.” Cameron wiped his eyes, and pulled Stick to his mouth. “I love you so, so much.”

“I’m sorry it’s taken me so long.”

“It’s okay,” Cameron held Stick’s face in his palms, just studying him. “I loved you through it all, anyways.”

“And I loved you too.”

Chapter End Notes

short one before we go downhill

he'll steal your heart and sail away

Chapter Summary

Charlie had been doing so well.

It was December. It was fucking freezing, and Knox Overstreet was smoking weed with a groupie who lived outside of the city and had come to see them play in Turin. They still had three more Italy dates to play. They'd blown up in the country and had already been doing press for this section of the tour for what felt like 2 years.

"Do you think there's life after death?" She asked him, blowing the smoke in his face.

Knox wanted to throw up. He was so, so sick of the conversations he'd been having with girls on the tour. He wanted to just let it be over already. Meeks and Pitts had practically turned into recluses, Stick and Cameron weren't much better, and Charlie was acting like he didn't exist. It was even worse than their first tour, if that was possible.

"Did you write it when you were in love?"

It's the same round of questions he's been answering since Paris. And that was nearly two months ago. The European tour from hell was never ending and awful. Awful because he wanted a friend, but Charlie was far away from being any friend now, and with the way he had been acting, Knox wanted to hate him. He wanted to fucking loathe him.

He'd been doing so, so well. But the tour and whatever he was doing when they weren't together or doing shows was even worse than the Charlie than he had known him to be.

“Can I suck your dick?”

Knox shifted, uncomfortable in the situation. He’d been talking to the girl in front of him out at the usual get together things that happened after the shows, and he wasn’t sure why he had asked her up to his in the first place. But now, she’d been smoking a joint and puffing it into his face, and he was just sitting there lamely, unsure of what to do.

“No. No, I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Can we go back downstairs?” He shifted, standing up. “I’m sorry. Can we go? Can we go?”

“Sure,” She nodded cooly, taking another drag. “Are you sure you don’t want any.”

“Yeah,” Knox felt like he was going to burst. He needed to go for a walk. He needed a drink. He needed a cigarette. He needed a sleeping pill. Everything was swirling far too much in his head, and he felt nauseous from it all. The traveling and the little amount of sleep he was getting and Charlie’s condition and the tour going worse and worse. They were the next best thing, the Beatles long over.

As they left the room and Knox locked up, they rode in silence down to where the party had been in the first place. Knox looked around, seeing the same cast of characters as there normally was, but now there were some extra additions.

Namely, Neil and Todd had come back down from their tower. Neil was talking to some girls who were very obviously flirting with him, and he was showing them some photos. He always seemed to have a photo or a anecdote about the four of them that made him very popular. Todd was over by the food, eating something and talking to Peter. He was no stranger to a flirtatious moment either, but no one

seemed to be asking him anything. Of course, they probably also didn't know that he was going to be the next Bob Dylan, with no guitar.

The groupie he was with was long gone, and he didn't ask any questions. He wanted to be alone for a little while. Peter was talking to Todd, a glaze over his eyes. Peter was always high or drunk at functions. Knox was trying to forgive him ever since Charlie had fallen off the deep end, but it was very hard. He couldn't help the grudge he was carrying, even if it wasn't Peter who had gotten Charlie addicted. He'd given to support Charlie's cause, but he wasn't the one that had gotten sick. He was trying to be okay with it, but it wasn't going well.

He had wanted to fire him, but he was trying to be a bigger person. Forgive. It was the new year, after all. His resolutions weren't going very well. He looks away from the can of soda he's opening to survey for the one person he always wants to see. Of course, it's not hard to find him. He's kissing the girl Knox had brought up to his room, and it all feels like a cruel twist of fate.

Before they'd left for tour, Charlie had been the one to bring up their predicament of falling into each other's beds. He was sober, and he looked gorgeous, and he was telling Knox they shouldn't sleep together because the press was so much worse in England that one slip of the hand and they could be outed. Knox had agreed, of course, because it was the reasonable thing to do.

And as the tour wore away, he was witnessing something that was breaking his heart far more than he could do on his own. Charlie was falling back into a habit, and no matter what Knox or Cameron or Stick or anybody said, he wasn't listening to them. It was breaking Knox's heart.

"Hey, how are you?" Todd bumped his shoulder, throwing him off guard.

“Oh, sorry. Hey,” Knox looked over at the blond. He was sporting a mustache again. He’d just recently shaved it off. “I’m okay. How are you?”

“I’m doing good, yeah. Better.” He was referring to, as Knox knew, the incident of getting drafted a few weeks prior. He had had to leave the tour, and Neil had been basically despondent. It had been a short meeting, and as he wasn’t really fit in the eyes of the army, he was back to work on the tour very quickly. “My poetry is doing pretty well. It’s almost scaring me.”

“I read that Dylan wanted to meet whoever had wrote Dead Poet.”

“Yeah,” Todd shook his head, “It’s fucking crazy.”

“You deserve it.”

“How is Charlie?”

“I don’t know.”

“Are you okay?”

“Honestly, no.”

“Hi,” Neil greeted, having finally broken apart from the masses. “Hi.”

“Hi, babe.” Todd smiled, “Knox?”

“I just don’t get it.” Knox knew he was going to start crying. It was just his nature. “I took him to rehab, and he was doing so, so well. For months. It’s almost been a year. And he’s just fucking throwing all of that away.”

“Charlie,” Neil’s voice sounded incredibly pained. “I’m so sorry, Knox. I can’t imagine what you must have gone through.”

Knox just nodded, taking another sip of the soda. He was going to cry if he had to do anything else. “How are you?”

“I’m good.” Neil looks at Todd, who is still eating a little cup full of some snack that had been provided. “I’m doing better.”

“You seemed pretty popular tonight.”

“Always am,” Neil agrees, holding out a hand for Todd to press a kiss to it. It’s the only form of intimacy the two engage in in public. Knox figures if Todd could wrangle the moon down, he’d give it to Neil in a heartbeat.

Knox watches Charlie follow the groupie into the bathroom, and he looks out of his mind. The girl from earlier looks like she wants to get to Charlie’s level. He wonders if she’ll get her wish. He doesn’t want to think about it too much. It hurts in his chest deeply, like a parasite that’s eating away at his heart slowly but surely.

He turns back to Neil and Todd, hearing them go back and forth about their trip to Amsterdam, clearly filling him in. He’s trying to listen,

but he can't. There's just something under his skin.

Then, a sound above the noise. A girl is screaming. Loudly. Terribly. It's terrifying. Knox and the couple look over to the source. It's the girl that went into the bathroom with Charlie. Her nose is bleeding. She just keeps screaming. Wild. Like a siren. A banshee. Some evil creature Knox can't name.

Then, he registers what she's saying. "*Help*!" He feels his feet take him to where she's standing before he can even think another second. "Oh my god, help! Help! He's passed out!" She's frantic. Her nose is bleeding. Her eyes are bloodshot.

Knox would and will feel bad for her, but all he can think about is Charlie. The bathroom seems to fill up with people as Knox runs in to find Charlie crumpled against the sink, his back upright next to it. He vaguely registers Todd rushing off with promises to call someone, gripping his hand in response. Neil and Peter are likely around too, but Knox's vision and thoughts all fall apart when he sees him.

"Charlie?" Knox's voice is caught up in his throat. "What did you take? Charlie! Charlie, what the fuck did you take?" He's sounding desperate. The groupie from earlier is standing a bit away from him, wiping at her nose and crying. There's a wealth of cocaine on the counter.

"Fuck, I thought it was okay. Fuck!" She curses, jittery. Knox can see it's affecting her greatly too, but he figures maybe she's a little more used to the stuff. Charlie was once, but he hasn't been for awhile. "Fuck. I saw him doing some earlier, so I figured he'd be fine. Is he okay?"

Charlie groans in response, seeing Knox but not really seeing much at all. He looks like he's fading fast. His heart rate is insane.

“Fuck. Fuck!” Knox can see that he’s fading fast, and he’s gripping him tightly, rocking up their bodies until they meet. “How much did you take?” His eyes are frantic, like a wild animal caught in the light of a car.

“How much did he take?” He realizes, too late, that he’s also screaming. There’s a little group all together, Peter growing wide-eyed as he watches the two. Neil is crying. “What the fuck did he take?” He asks the groupie, who is crying hysterically and picking at her thigh. Knox doesn’t want to know if she shoots up. He can’t take much more of this.

“I don’t know! I don’t fucking know!” She cries, “He said he could handle it! He said he’s had a lot of pills tonight. Maybe that was it!”

“He clearly fucking can’t. Somebody call an ambulance!” There’s too many people. Neil tries to tell him that Todd called the ambulance, but it’s like Knox can’t hear him. He knows somebody is taking a photograph. He can feel the flash on his back and it glints in Charlie’s hair. He’s holding him up, trying to get him to breath, trying to do anything he can for him. He doesn’t know what to do. His head is swimming, Charlie is dimming before him, and there’s a horde of people all around them.

“It’s coming, okay? It’s coming, so you better fucking stay awake, okay?” He’s mumbling gibberish, trying to make himself feel a little bit better about all of it. He wants to punch Charlie in the face and kiss him better and do a number of other things he can’t now name.

“It’ll be here in a jiffy.” Peter assures. “Get out. Everybody fucking get out of here!”

Peter is tall, and when he's mad, he's mad. It doesn't take long for everybody to obey.

"Charlie? Charlie can you hear me?"

He grunted, but he didn't say anything. His eyes were glazed over. He didn't know what Charlie had been up to lately. His mind was whirling. He was so, so scared, and Charlie was just lying there dumbly before him.

"Knox? Knox?" Neil was still there, and there was a lot of commotion from outside the bathroom. "The ambulance is here."

A pair of two came in, and Knox stood up and back, assessing the situation. "You family?" One of them asked, a sigh escaping her mouth as they fixed him onto the stretcher.

"I'm his brother." He found himself saying, although that was certainly preposterous. They looked nothing alike now, with Charlie's figure that was falling apart and his gaunt face slack.

"Alright, you can ride in the ambulance." The girl said, and she shifted so that the team could take Charlie out, Knox following behind lamely. The cameras kept flashing, despite Peter's vehement protests. He felt like he was going to throw up. He walked to the front of the ambulance lamely as they loaded Charlie in, doing as he had been instructed.

He had wanted to ride in the back, but the girl had given him a strange look, as if she knew he didn't know what was really happening.

“You’re not going to want to see this.”

So Knox sat in the front, trying to keep himself from crying in front of the driver, who was careening haphazardly on the way. The hospital wasn’t far, but Knox felt sick to his stomach.

Charlie had been doing good. So, so good. He didn’t think he had noticed anything recently that would have been an indicator of him having fallen off the deep end, but then, he realized that Charlie had been avoiding him, ever since they’d gotten across the pond.

He also looked exhausted, like he hadn’t slept in a few days. The first time he noticed was just moments ago, when he was holding Charlie in his hands.

He followed around, trying to keep out of the way of everybody as they rolled him in. A nurse told him to sit out in the waiting room, told him that he was going to need to fill out some paperwork. A doctor would be with him shortly.

Knox did as told, filling out the paperwork, knowing Charlie’s height and eye color and all the other bits about him as if he was filling out the information for himself. He wasn’t sure he knew what love was, if this was part of it. Was love stringing himself out like this? Was love picking up the pieces? Was love a decade and some of unrequited half-madness? Because surely, that was what this was. He had to be mad. To be sitting here, tears pouring down his face, as he filled out paperwork and turned his attention to the doctor, who was coming out of Charlie’s room.

Another nurse had recognized Knox, and so he was sitting in a little area in the emergency room, instead of the aforementioned waiting room area.

“You’re with Mr. Dalton?”

“Yes.”

The doctor sighed, shaking his head. “He’s had an overdose.”

Knox didn’t dare breathe.

“He should recover just fine. He’ll need to be here for a few days, at least. We’ll have to transfer him upstairs.”

He takes the papers from Knox, looks them over.

“Family?”

Knox doesn’t answer that this time.

“You can be for tonight. He’ll need some time in there. You shouldn’t see him for awhile yet.”

“Alright.” He answers, because he doesn’t know if he can do anything else now. He thinks he should call someone. Meeks or Pitts or Neil or Cameron. But he can’t. He’s rooted in his chair, rooted in fear.

my love for you is overpowering

Chapter Summary

Charlie wakes up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Charlie wakes up, he feels like he's died and come back to life. HIs bones feel like jelly and his head is pounding and he feels like he's got cotton in his mouth. When he wakes up, he's sweating. His eyes adjust painfully to the dim lighting and he wonders how long he's been asleep. There's only one light on, a lamp, by his bed. There's a chair. Knox is sitting in it, asleep. He has large bags under his eyes and he looks exhausted, even though he was sleeping.

Charlie wanted to get up, to ask what had happened to him, but he had a pretty grim idea of what it was anyways. He knew that he'd thrown it all away. Any relationship with Knox that may have started after his rehab never did, and then they went on tour. He was falling in love all over again, and they had to go on fucking tour and make a best selling, number one album. With two hit singles, and a fucking European tour on top of all of it.

They'd only slept together twice since he'd left rehab. The first time he practically had to beg for it, because Knox was pretty deep in a creative zone and had barely done anything in weeks other than write and rewrite every song for their new album, which hadn't yet been set to music. Charlie had kissed him after they'd finished and Knox mumbled against him that his lips were going to be in his next song. Charlie tried to tell himself that he'd imagined it. The second time was when Knox got his first big hit. He'd tried to stay away for most of the day, but after the phone call that morning, he'd called later that day. One thing led to another and he was on his knees before he could even think twice.

But ever since the tour had started, he coudln't handle it. He didn't

want to be oogled. He didn't want to be talked about in the papers. He didn't want to be watched like a fish in a bowl. He didn't want to avoid Knox like he had the plague, he didn't want to fall back into bad habits. But he was falling in love, and for the first time since he was a kid, he thought that there was a chance that Knox didn't feel the same way. Of course, he'd always been weary of Knox's true feelings.

But after their debacle about New Years and all the times before and after, he knew that Knox had wanted something to do with him. He'd paid for his rehab. He'd visited him every single Sunday. He'd asked his therapist. She said that that was love. He knew it was love. He knew Knox loved him. But because he knew that he loved him, he'd tried to distance himself. Ever since he'd gotten out, Knox had acted like he wasn't the same person anymore. And he wasn't, really. He'd been much healthier.

And then the tour started. And it was like rehab had never even fucking happened. Everything was too enticing, and he had to forget about Knox and how he was falling in love all over again and it felt like the first time and the cameras and the fucking reporters and the comparisons and everything was just falling on top of each other. He couldn't fucking handle it.

And there was a night when he had gotten really drunk in Paris with a guy and his girlfriend, and he figured there was going to be something with them later in the night. He was taking a shot, laughing along with them, and then he turned, and he saw Knox. Knox, who was very clearly not falling in love with him. Knox who was looking at him like he'd made him cry. Knox who was looking at him like he never should have bothered in the first place. And he deserved that. It was true. So one turned to another and then another drink turned to LSD and he'd been on a downwards spiral ever since.

But sitting in a hospital bed, with Knox (who was decidedly not in love with him anymore) sitting across from him, sleeping, he though that maybe that was love. Charlie wasn't sure he knew anymore. Then, he started to cry. He knew why he was here. That last hit had done him in, as he'd been riding an intense cocaine high for the past

four days. He'd barely slept. He'd clearly overdosed, somehow, on something, and he felt like shit. The last thing in the world that should have been happening was Knox taking care of him, and yet here he was. That was love. That was love!

Wiping his eyes, Charlie sat up, trying not to pull out his various things hooked up to his arm as he grabbed his chart at the end of the bed. As he flipped through, it was exactly what he'd thought. He'd had a drug overdose. Too many pills, too much cocaine. Too much of everything and not enough time to process it all. Seeing his stats for the first time was really, really scary. He felt like he was going to start crying all over again. This wasn't who he was. It wasn't. And he'd known that, when he'd gotten clean. But now he was doing it all over again like a fucking jackass.

A movement in the chair startled him, and he looked over to Knox, who was clearly waking up.

"You're awake." His voice sounded strained. He'd been crying.

"Uh, yeah," He nodded, "I am."

"How are you feeling?"

"I feel like shit."

"I know."

"How long have you been here?"

“Since they brought you in last night. You’ve been up a couple of times, but mostly out of it. They gave you some pretty serious sleeping stuff.” He took a deep inhale, as if the next part was going to hurt to say. “They said you hadn’t slept in four days.”

“Oh,” Charlie shook his head, feeling his eyes burn with tears. “Yeah.”

“Charlie…” Knox stood up, trying to make sense of things. He was wearing a pink shirt, blue jeans, and a pair of sneakers. He looked rumpled. Like he hadn’t left. “Charlie, I don’t know what to say.”

“I know,” And there it was. The flood gate had opened up, and he was crying. “I know.”

Knox sat on the edge of his bed, looking at the closed window and then at Charlie. “I’m glad you’re awake.”

“I”m sorry.”

“You scared me so bad Charlie that I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to forgive you.” Knox sighed, and took Charlie’s hand. “I don’t know why you do this to yourself, but you really fucking scared me. I need you to tell me what's the matter, because I don’t ever want to feel that way again.” He traced his pointer finger across Charlie’s hand, surveying. “I don’t ever want to feel that way again.” He repeated, looking up at him.

“Why are you still here?”

“You were sick. I needed to make sure you were okay. Just like the

last time."

"You shouldn't have stayed. I threw everything you gave me away."

"I know." Knox sighed, shifting a little closer, touching Charlie's cheek. "I'm so angry with you, I can't even talk about it. But you're okay, and right now, that's all that matters to me."

"I know," Charlie looked down at his hands. He was still falling in love. He wondered if he'd ever stopped.

"You're going to be okay. And you're going to get better this time. For the first time."

"Okay."

"You are. Cameron told me that the reason he and Stick finally started showing that they were together was because one night I went to their place so drunk out of my mind and complaining about you that when they went to bed Stick asked him if he ever made him feel that way and Cameron said yes. All it took was for them to see me so strung out that they agreed that they didn't want to make each other feel that way anymore."

"Have I been making you feel this way for a long time?"

"Yes."

"Knox," Charlie doesn't know where it's all coming from. Every part of

his body hurts. “Do you love me?”

Knox squeezes Charlie’s hand, gives him what is likely the world’s most sorrowful smile, and shakes his head. “I’m not talking with you about that until you’re well.”

“You didn’t talk to me about it when I got better.”

“You weren’t better.”

“Do you love me?” Charlie's strung out on the feeling.

“I’m not going to answer that.” Knox huffs, “I need to call everybody and let them know you’re awake.”

“Can’t you tell me? I’ll tell you.”

“Don’t.”

“I will. I’ll tell you right now.”

“Charlie, don’t.” Knox shakes his head and stands, just to prove his point further. The depth and graveness of it is a bit too much for Charlie at this point. “I’m going to make a phone call. Don’t tell me something you’ll regret in two weeks.” He turns on his heel and out of the room, and then it’s just Charlie, and a nurse who eventually comes in.

Something he'll regret in two weeks. As if he was going to change his opinion on being in love with him when he'd had the opinion since he'd shook his little damp hand and introduced himself as Knox Overstreet. As if anything could ever change that.

Chapter End Notes

I know this has been a roller coaster so far. Am quite sorry... but love you guys! xoxo

by saying something stupid

Chapter Summary

> 4 weeks later, Charlie is feeling a bit better. More than he did. He needs to tell Knox. Now.

The next couple of weeks are hard. Meeks and Pitts are stuck with doing reconnaissance work for the band. Interviews conducted and photographs explained and they're trying their best to carry on with grace. But it isn't very easy. Everybody wants to know how Charlie Dalton, frontman of Letters From The Fight, managed to end up with a one way ticket to the hospital for a drug overdose. (And especially when he's just left rehab!)

The tour is on hold for the time being, and while they'd agreed that it was best to just cancel and get out while they were ahead, the fans and companies hosting and everybody else that wasn't the four people performing had many other ideas. So now, they were just waiting. Waiting for Charlie to get better and for the band to get back to the road, even if they didn't want to.

The idea of getting back to the road made Knox nervous more than anyone. Meeks was getting tired of it, as he and Pitts were eager to just get back to their normal lives and stop beating around the bush that they wanted to the band anymore. They didn't.

Knox was also anxious about getting back to tour. The companies hadn't let Charlie rest very long, and as soon as the cocaine had sweated out of his system, they were meant to return to touring. The touring thing was very stressful to Knox, because they were essentially going right back into the belly of the beast, and Charlie had barely had enough time to recuperate.

Cameron moves around the room situation. They're saving a lot of money this tour. Neil and Todd and Meeks and Pitts and now Charlie

and Knox were going to be sharing a room. It was like the first days of their first ever tour, with too much love in their hearts and nowhere to put it. Now, they're back to the drawing board. Knox thinks he should probably go to rehab instead of insisting that he'll be fine this time, but he doesn't have much to say.

The concerts are long and the press is longer and the nights aren't fueled by anything now. They're fueled by a bottle of water and a quick blown kiss to the groupies and then they were carted back to their hotel, past whatever was awaiting them and into their respective hotel rooms.

It was about four weeks after the incident that Knox felt like he was ready to talk about it. He had come upon a great drought of writing inspiration, which was likely put on by the incredible depression he felt whenever he looked at Charlie. He loved him, and he wasn't sure there was ever going to be a time to tell him.

Charlie, upon agreeing that he was going to get better (for the second time) was eager to ask Knox about the conversation they had had in the hospital. Knox didn't want to talk about it. They had been toying around the elephant in the room.

They hadn't slept next to each other yet. It didn't seem as if they were going to. Charlie was in his bed, nursing a cigarette while Knox was sitting in his own, journaling and mindlessly watching the television.

"Feels weird to sit here with you."

"Hm?" Knox asked, in the middle of a sentence about how deeply in love he was and how he always would be.

"Feels weird to just sit here with you."

“Why?”

“It’s like school.”

“I think we’re a bit too old for it to be like school.”

“It is. Like when we were kids. Lying down across from each other.”

Knox stills, closes his little notebook. He can get back to it later.

“I mean, I just can’t remember the last time we slept in the same room when my hands weren’t on you in some way.”

“Yeah,” Knox nods, holding his breath.

“I’m sorry about what I did.”

“I know you are. You’ve told me seventeen times today.”

“Eighteen now.”

“Eighteen now.”

“Do you think you will fall in love with me? That you could?”

“*Charlie*,”

“When I’m better. If I’m really better this time. Will you? Could you?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“What’s the newest album about, really?”

“All sorts of things. Stories I made up. People I’ve met or know. I’ve said that in interviews. You know that.”

“I’ve heard you say what it’s about. What’s it really about?”

“That’s what it’s about.”

“But song by song. Give me a play by play.”

“I don’t know if I feel comfortable talking about all of it.”

“Do you hate me for what I did?”

“No.” Knox shakes his head fiercely. “I could never hate you. If I ever said anything that made you think I hate you, then you misunderstood me.”

Charlie sighs loudly, puts out his cigarette. He swings his legs around the bed and takes a long drink of water from the bottle he's got set next to his bed. "I just miss you."

"I'm right here." Knox says, biting at his fingernails. He's got his boxers and a shirt from their tour on. Charlie's basically a mirror of him. The same clothes. Their hair that's getting slightly longer. Knox needs to cut his bangs again. They're getting in his eyes.

"No. I miss you."

"You miss having sex with me?"

"Yes, but that's not what I'm talking about. I miss when we were younger."

"Well, yeah. We're nearly thirty."

"No. I miss when we were honest with each other. Like when we were in school. You knew everything about me."

"Did I?" Knox challenges. He can see Charlie still.

"No."

"Then we haven't really been honest with each other."

"I guess not."

“So what do you miss then?”

“I miss something I’ve never had.”

“Love.”

“Yeah. Love.”

“With me.”

“There’s never been anyone else, Knox. Ever.”

“We’ve had people.”

“That’s not what I’m saying. I’m saying there’s never been anyone else for me.” Charlie feels like he’s going to throw up. He can’t believe what’s coming out of his mouth.

Knox is silent, looking down at his notebook again.

“Don’t you feel that same way?” Charlie’s desperate. Knox can hear it tinged in his voice.

“I can’t say it to you. I can’t. I’m sorry. But I just can’t.”

“I know I’m not better yet. I know that. I just can’t sit here anymore and not tell you. It’s fucking killing me, Knox.”

“Stop. Don’t tell me now. Just wait a little longer. Okay?”

“I tried that. I’ve been trying it for years, Knox. I don’t know how much longer I can wait.” He stands up and then crosses the space between their beds. He picks up Knox’s notebook and places it on the table that’s connecting their beds, looking intensely at him.

“Don’t say it.” Knox shakes his head furiously. “Stop it.”

“You told me I’d regret it in two weeks. Do you know how much that stung?”

“I said you might regret telling me then. I know you would’ve. You were in the hospital.”

“I’m not in the hospital anymore.”

“No.”

“Knox, you know that I’ve always felt like this for you. You must’ve.”

“*Charlie*,”

“Let me finish, dammit!” He’s exasperated. Knox knows why. He is too. “I have felt like this for you since I was 12. 12 years old! When

you came into my life, I needed a friend. But I didn't know I was going to just feel like this for the rest of my life. I wanted to tell you so many times. When we were fourteen at your parent's Fourth of July party. When I was seventeen and you asked me what kissing was like. When I was on vacation before we went to college. When we were in college and you told me about how you were going on dates. And then when I walked in on you and that guy, that was the first time I thought I could have a chance. A real one.

"And then you told me you wanted to sleep with me. *Oh my god*. When you said that, my heart burst out of my chest. You weren't asking me to be friends with benefits. Nothing we were doing was by textbook definition. I want to worship you. All of the fucking time. All of the time. Your music. Your funny little bangs. Your laugh and your care and your demeanor. You always pick me up from when I fall. Always. You do so much for me that I'm never going to be able to repay you. You care for me unconditionally. You care for everyone unconditionally. You're beautiful and you're selfless and you love dearly.

"And of course I get mad when you write those songs about me. Of course I do. Because they're so intense, and we've never even had a conversation about any of it. I know you don't want me to talk about it, but this isn't something that's going to go away in a week. In a year. You could not talk to me for seven years and I would still feel the same way. Knox, I lo-" Charlie's words mangled against the clash of Knox's lips to his own, passion and intensity and care and the words Charlie had been pouring onto him all wrapped up into them.

"Let me say it," Charlie huffs against him, slotting their lips back together. "You don't have to say it back. You don't have to. I know you do. I know. I lo-" He doesn't win that one either, Knox's lips back on his own.

"I don't want you to say it."

“Why?”

“Because when you say it, when you’re you again, I want to say it back.”

“*Oh.*”

“I want to say it until I can’t anymore.”

“So you…” Charlie’s voice trails off, his hands in Knox’s hair, trailing them through anything he can touch as he kisses him. His eyes are watering.

“When you say it again, I’ll be there to say it back.”

“You promise?” Charlie pulls off of his neck to look at him, eyes tinged with tears and something much deeper.

“Of course. I promise.” Knox kisses him, and they wrap around each other. It’s not going to get any easier, this whole band thing. But for one night, Knox wonders if maybe they just had to hit the lowest to move on. To really leave behind everything that they needed to.

all will be well

Chapter Summary

It’s not until 1973 that Charlie thinks it isn’t all a dream.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s not until 1973 that Charlie thinks it isn’t all a dream. Knox has his head in the toilet, there’s a groupie smoking in his connected room, and it hits Charlie all too suddenly that this isn’t what he wanted when he and Meeks decided one night they’d drunkenly start a band.

“You leave anything here?” He asks the groupie, who is putting her cigarette out on the carpet of Knox’s room.

“Haven’t even started anything yet.” She grumbles, and they don’t say anything more before she slips out of the door.

As soon as she’s gone, Charlie’s back in the bathroom, a sinking feeling rolling around in his stomach. “Knox?”

He can’t hear anything over the retching sounds, but Knox groans in response. Charlie’s on the ground in a blink of an eye.

“What’d you take?” He’s asking desperately, and Knox pulls himself from the toilet, shaggy bangs in his face. They’re plastered to his face with all the sweat. “What’d you take?” Charlie huffs, his hands on Knox’s back, steadying him.

“Nothing,” He coughs, and throws his head back into the toilet.

"*Knox*," It's a warning. They've done this before, the roles reversed. That was nearly eight months ago, in the longest, worst leg of a European tour Charlie could ever have imagined. He hadn't slept in four days because of all the coke, and then he'd nearly overdosed after a cocktail of pills, all handed to him by various groupies or the people they were touring with.

Knox had had rushed him to the hospital, muttering incoherently about how he had to take care of himself. It had been a terrible night, and even worse as the coke wore off subsequently during the next period of time.

"It's nothin', Char." Knox chokes, and then he's hurling again. Nothing's coming out, but he's retching so badly his whole body is shaking.

"Knox?"

It's another few moments before Knox can answer. He pulls himself away, his forehead drenched in sweat, his lips quivering. He's shivering, and there seems to be something bubbling at the surface.

"What's the matter?" Charlie asks, because he wants to believe that Knox isn't using. He's never seen him do anything, but the road gets hard. They've all had brushes with things they regret. Charlie more than any of them. If Knox was headed down the path as well, it was going to break his heart.

"I haven't slept in three days." He answers, the exhaustion suddenly so clear upon his face that Charlie doesn't know how he didn't see it sooner.

“What?”

“I just can’t.”

“What’s that got to do with this? Did you get food poisoning or something?”

“No,” Knox shrugs, “I’m just tired.”

“We gotta get you to bed.”

“I’ve tried, Charlie, but I can’t. I just can’t sleep.” Knox is pulling himself up, the nausea subsiding. He drags himself wearily to the sink, hanging onto it tightly.

“Knox,” Charlie’s gripping his hips, trying to keep him upright. He’s got about three inches on him, but it feels like more now. Like he’s towering over him. Charlie wonders briefly if that was how it felt while Knox dragged him to get his stomach pumped that night.

“I’m fine, Charlie.”

“I sent that girl on your couch home.”

“I figured.”

“What were you thinking going on stage tonight? You should have told me you felt like this.”

“I was fine. The adrenaline,” Knox is explaining, but he’s not really saying anything at all.

“What’s the matter?”

Knox looks up at him through his bleary eyes in the mirror. He feels a deep thud settle in his chest because of all people, he didn’t want Charlie to see him like this. He was supposed to be the strong one of the two. The one that picked him up off of the ground and could take care of himself just fine. Charlie’d done enough in their childhood to account for all the years he was doing now.

“Talk to me,” Charlie says, his voice a bit above a whisper as his hold on Knox tightens. Knox would be spinning if it wasn’t for the sick feeling settling in his body.

“I am fine, Charlie. I’m just tired.”

“I know that, but…” Charlie could feel his insides rearranging, trying to make more space for all this hurt within his bones.

“Go back to your room. I’ll be fine.” Knox said, his toothbrush clacking against his teeth.

“No.”

“I’m fine, alright?” Knox says it through the paste, so it’s garbled, but Charlie can see from his eyes in the mirror that he means it. Knox may mean it, but it isn’t enough to let him feel like he’s off the hook.

“No.” Charlie tightens his hands on Knox’s hips, feels the scorch of his pinky that’s trailed underneath Knox’s tank and sitting atop his plaid pajama bottoms; the burn that’s coursing through his veins.

Knox spits, and then stills completely as he looks at Charlie through the mirror. His skin is burning from the touch, his head is swimming, and he feels like he’s unable to grab anything. His fingers feel like they’re slipping from the counter.

“What the fuck d’ya mean, no?”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

“Charlie,” It comes out a huff. Knox knows he’s defenseless right now, too bone tired to do anything about it, and Charlie’s stubborn. Always has been.

“You gotta go to bed, Knox.”

“I know. I am. I will.”

Charlie lets go of him then, and they trudge out to the bed part of the hotel. Knox goes about checking on things: the alarm he’s set, his journal in his suitcase, his pack of Marlboros. By the time he’s checked everything and taken off his socks, he finds Charlie curled into his bed.

“I have a couch,” Knox grumbles, slinking carefully into the space next to his oldest friend.

“Yeah,” Charlie looks a bit crushed, like his gesture of their age old slumber parties had left Knox’s mind all together.

“You’re fine,” Knox says a smile tinting through it, “Just giving you a hard time.” He shivers, although the sheets are reaching his chin.

Charlie’s a hydrant of heat. He always has been and tonight was no different, and so it took no effort or decision for Charlie to close the space between their bodies and wrap himself around Knox.

“You need a sweater or something?”

“Fine. Just tired,”

“How long has it been like this?”

Knox shifts in the arms, the scorch of them electrifying and comforting, like Charlie’s arms always had been. “Few months now,” He staggers through the rest. “Been having bad nightmares, I guess. Can’t get good sleep anymore, and I’m too afraid to take anything to help.”

“Maybe you’ll sleep well tonight.” Charlie offers, his breath hot on Knox’s neck. Knox can’t see him, but he doesn’t need to. He knows how dangerous it would be to turn around and fall in love all over again like that night when he was 12. He’d tried to tell him that. Months ago. It wasn’t going well.

“Maybe,” Knox is still shivering from the exhaustion. “If I wake up

screaming, don't say anything."

"I'll fight 'em off," Charlie says, and Knox can feel the pride in his chest, can feel how he almost feels like the old Charlie behind him. The Charlie that was muscular and full, much unlike the Charlie he'd come to know in recent years. It was a comfort to know that he was coming back into himself. "I'll fight all the damn monsters off. The dragons too."

"Where's your armor?"

"I'm wearing it. Can't you feel it?" Charlie chuckles, small and low. It tickles the back of Knox's neck, and Charlie pulls him closer. His arm snakes around Knox's waist and finds his hand, threading their fingers together.

"Yeah," Knox whispers, unsure if Charlie can even hear him, unsure why the gesture makes him want to cry. "I feel it."

Charlie breathes easy after that, and as Knox seems to drift away in his arms, his own head starts spinning. *Months* . Knox has been sick from this exhaustion for months, and nobody noticed much of anything. He feels sick from that, from the implications. They've all been so busy the last few months. Getting back to touring, touring in America, getting through the festivals and the other bands around them breaking up and all the goddamn interviews. It's been hard. Harder than Charlie had wanted it to be all those years ago.

Knox shifts, and his breathing changes. Charlie knows he isn't asleep.

"Knox?"

“We need to stop the band.”

“Yeah,” Charlie agrees, pulling him infinitely closer, kissing his cheek.

“It’s killing us.” He shifts, “Charlie,” Knox sighs, “It’s been so hard not saying anything. Especially with how you’ve been doing lately.”

“But now you aren’t doing well. You wanted me to wait. I’ll wait.”

“Yeah,” Knox whispers, and Charlie can hear the crinkles in his voice. He’s crying.

“What have you been dreaming about?” Knox shakes out of his grasp, sits up, and puts his head in his hands. Charlie follows him, his hands never leaving him.

“You. The band. That night almost a year ago.”

“I’m right here.”

“But you almost weren’t. I thought you were going to die.”

Charlie doesn’t know what to say. He’s at a loss for words.

“Do you want to do this anymore?”

“The band? Or us?”

“The band.”

“No.”

“Us?”

“If the band was over, I think we could.”

“You think?”

“I know,” Knox huffs, lies back down and cuddles back into Charlie’s arms. “I think I always knew. That’s why I asked you in the first place.”

“Knox, I-” Charlie stops himself before he can say anything else. Before he says I love you and ruins it all. “You’re my best friend. Get some sleep.”

Chapter End Notes

me when wrapping up … 3

a long farewell

Chapter Summary

It’s over.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s a sunny day in Meeks and Pitts’ shared apartment when the boys get together to discuss their future. Steven hadn’t wanted to be a part of the band in a long while. Not after Charlie, and certainly not after Knox, and maybe it was way back to the first time he was caught kissing Gerard that really was the tip of his own iceberg.

He thinks about the fun that they’ve had. The long nights and the joy and the love and the care and the fans. The letters. The rush of performing. The checks that just keep rolling in. Their number one hit. The thrill of talking about their music and the excitement of sharing it with a rapt audience. Of course, there were highs. There were great highs to the band.

However, as of late, there had been too many low lows to make up for all of the great times. The great times were the before, the during, and likely what would come after. The great times before were the late nights sitting on their floor, drinking warm beers and dancing to the radio, just happy to be in a place without school and fathers and anything else that they wanted to leave behind.

The middle was full of bad and good, the highs and the lows of what came with their band and the subsequent fame. There was also the end, which lay out before them like a desert, never ending and warm. It could be dangerous, surely, but if navigated correctly, it would be beautiful.

“I think we know why we’re all here.” Charlie said, the first to speak

up of the little group.

“Yeah,” Meeks nods, looking over at Gerard, interlocking their fingers together. “It’s got to be over.”

“It’s been a long time coming.” Knox says, “I mean, I still want to write, but it’s just not the same.”

“No,” Meeks agrees, “It isn’t.”

“I love to play. I’m sure we all love to play.” Gerard is trying to be reasonable, for no reason in particular. They’re all in agreement.

“My heart hasn’t been in it for a long time.”

“Same,” Gerard tightens his grip on Steven’s fingers. “I stopped when they caught that photo of us.”

“This has been a long time coming.” Charlie agrees, looking over at Knox, who has been more well-rested as of late.

The tour is over. They didn’t have any current obligations, and it seemed as though all four of them were in agreement. They were going to be like the bands before them, breaking up to leave their music to history.

“What is Cam gonna say?”

“He’s got other responsibilities over there.”

“Yeah,” Gerard nods, grabbing his car keys to take them all over to the studio, dropping Steven’s hand to go outside. “I’m sure he’ll be okay with it.”

“I hope so.”

“He will be.”

“What about Todd? Peter? All the others?” Knox says once they’ve gotten into the car, “They’re all employed by us.”

“Yeah,” Gerard says, “But they have other things to do. Todd has his work and Neil isn’t our employee, not really, and Peter has been running around bands for years. No worries.”

“I’m still gonna worry.”

“We know.”

The drive to the studio feels slow, although it isn’t any faster or slower than usual. New York City passes by them in a haze, and Charlie wonders briefly if he always wants to live here. He had loved it originally, the pace and the people and getting lost inside of it all.

“We’re going to move.” Meeks breaks the soft silence, the radio being the only thing playing around them.

“I was just thinking about that.” Charlie laughs, even with the distance that they’d had, they still had similar thoughts, just like when they were boys.

“We want to get out of the city.”

“I’d like that too. But I’m not very rooted here, I guess.”

“You could be,” Knox offers, “For a little while, at least.”

“What are you going to do with all the free time?”

“Write. I want to write. I want to write something else, though. Maybe a book. I feel like I won’t be able to stop now that I’ve started.”

“Charlie?”

“I just want to be normal for awhile.”

“Yeah,” Gerard nods, “Me too.”

“I want to fall in love.”

“I do too.”

“Maybe you can do it together.” Meeks laughs.

They shift back into that silence and then they pull up to the studio. There’s reporters everywhere, and a valet comes to take the keys from Gerard’s hand. He’s familiar. They’ve all had conversations with him now and again. The slew of photographers and reporters descend on them like a herd of shark to a school of fish.

There seems to be no end, but they’re inside of the studio sooner than they had thought they would be. It’s another round of questions and hellos to various people that they recognize, and then they have to wait in Sticks’s waiting room instead of hopping into it with no further questions.

Knox is tapping his foot, up and down, up and down. Gerard and Meeks are exchanging looks, reaching for the magazines on the table. Charlie is looking anywhere but the area that isn’t the floor.

“He’ll see you now.”

“Is Cameron in there with him? Richard Cameron?”

“I believe so. They were making a deal earlier with a new client.”

The new client moves past them, a wiry looking girl of about twenty. Charlie finds himself hoping that that venture goes well for them.

“How is my favorite band in the world doing?” Stick greets them as they enter, a big smile on his face. The deal must have gone well, or he’s just happy to see them. He’s been more happy to see them ever since they all got sober.

“We need to talk about the band.” Gerard begins, eager to get started. “We’re all in agreement. We can’t make it another three years.”

“What?” Cameron straightens from his relaxed position close to Stick, having inched closer after the last client had left.

“We can’t do this another three or four years.”

“You want to break up the band?” Sticks furrows his brow, “You’ve just barely gotten started.”

“Yeah,” Meeks begins, “But we haven’t been in it for awhile. I don’t want to tour. I don’t like it. Knox may have more to say, but I don’t think the band has anything more to offer, especially to music. We were never going to be the Beatles.”

“So?”

“So his point is that we want to break up the band.” Knox finishes.

“You want to end the band.”

“Yes. It’s killing us.” Pitts speaks up again, “It’s torn us apart. Charlie and then Knox. It’s a miracle it didn’t throw me and Stevie to the rats too. We just can’t do this anymore. We aren’t happy.”

“So you’re fine? The four of you?” Cameron is quick to ask.

“We’re great.” Charlie says, “We’re better than we have been in years. But we just don’t want to do it anymore. It’s not worth it.”

“Alright,” Stick says, “There will be some paperwork. Maybe a lot of paperwork.”

“Will we still get royalties?”

“You own it, don’t you? They’re your songs.”

“I’ll be sad to see you go.”

“This isn’t goodbye,” Knox frowns, “You’re our friends. We just don’t want to make music anymore. The touring, the load of it all, it’s not appealing.”

“You don’t have to explain it to anybody, much less to me. Of course I’m sad to see you all go, but it’s not goodbye. I’ll be seeing lots of you, of that I’m sure.” Stick stood up, fumbling with various folders and papers.

“Thanks for the ride, Dalton.” Cameron smiles, and he looks like he’s going to cry.

“It was a wild one. Wasn’t it?” Charlie wonders, briefly, if the bar would have him back. Even if it was only for something to do. He almost misses his jobs before the band.

“You’ll have to tell Todd. Neil.”

“Peter can easily be re-assigned. I’m not sure if Todd or Neil will want to be.”

“Neil wasn’t always our photographer. I’m sure he can get work elsewhere.”

“He’s not even strictly our photographer,” Meeks laughs, “They’ll be okay.”

“Todd’s on his way to making a New York Times bestseller anyways.”

“Yeah,” Knox nods, “I think we’ll all be okay. I think we’ll all be better with this decision.”

“I agree.” Meeks signs the piece of paper that Stick has passed around.

“So it’s over?” Charlie shakes his head, “It can’t be that easy.”

“Well, it really can be. I’m not going to make you owe the company millions of dollars. You’re our best money maker right now. But, you aren’t happy. And your happiness is much more important than a band.”

“Thank you.” Meeks stands, and Gerard stands with him. They’re two peas in a pod, ready to fly the coop.

“We’ll see you around, surely. Take care of yourself for a little while.”

They all part ways, hugging or brushing a tear away. It’s a bittersweet moment, despite the pains of it all. There’s a lot of discomfort in the air of the relationships ending, despite the glee that they’re over. It’s going to hurt, this new chapter of their lives. But as the four smile and wave to the cameras before getting into Gerard’s car, it feels as though they’re driving into the sunrise. They’re driving into a future that’s for once, promising. For once, something that they can all control.

Chapter End Notes

this is what my writing looks like (REAL): mumble mumble blah blah beep boop beep boop asdfghjkl!!!!! & that’s awesome

all the love that i hold inside

Chapter Summary

Charlie shows up at Knox's door with flowers.

It's been two months since the band was over. Two months of answering the phone to another person asking about when they were going to get back together, of trying to avoid the press and media and everybody and anybody who was inevitably going to ask: *when will Letters From the Fight be back*? *When is your new album coming out*? And, of course, *Why did you break up*?

It was exhausting, to say the least. And they couldn't very well be seen together without an onslaught of questions, photographs, and anything else that warranted something unusual. It seemed that the public couldn't believe that four friends, who were still claiming to be friends, could break up.

There was more important things happening. The war. The presidential election that was coming up. There was always something more important than the band of four. Always.

For Charlie, it felt like they were finally free. He hadn't had to work in two months, living off of nothing but the gobs of money that the band had made. It felt nice, to be able to be so free of work for the time being. For Knox, it was just nice to not have to create anything that people could sing along to. He loved the new ability to write he had, the ability to create stories of people and places and things, to create without judging himself about the rhyme scheme or if it was going to be a song that you could sing along to.

There was a wall that needed to be bridged over, that much was for sure. Charlie went back and forth for days, trying to tell himself that maybe it was too early. Maybe it was too late. He didn't know. But either way, he was at Knox's door with flowers, and it was late at

night. His watch read 1AM, but he was somehow convinced that Knox was awake. He'd driven over in the dark, hoping to avoid any paparazzi. He was pretty sure he'd been successful.

A knock, followed by ringing the doorbell was enough to make Charlie's stomach do a backflip or three. He felt more nervous than he ever had in his entire life, although the unspoken words between himself and Knox were surely reciprocated from each party, they hadn't spoken them aloud yet. Tonight seemed as good as any. His heart was hammering in his chest loudly. Surely Knox could hear it from the side of his door, even if he was fast asleep.

Another ring sounded, and Charlie could vaguely hear Knox walking towards the door. "Who is it?" He didn't bother to open the door. Charlie knew what that was. To not want to open the door, in case a flashing camera greeted you.

"It's me, Knoxie."

"Charlie?" Knox opened the door, his hair a bit disheveld. "Did you call?"

"No," Charlie shook his head, "Sorry if I woke you up."

"You didn't." He shifted his feet, and opened up the door, beckoning Charlie inside. "You brought flowers."

"Yeah," Charlie nods, watches Knox as he closes and locks the door behind him.

"What are you doing here?"

“Just didn’t want to spend the night without you.”

“Are those for me?”

“Of course.”

“What are you doing here?” Knox takes the flowers from Charlie, pads across his floor to the kitchen. Charlie watches as he grabs a vase and fills it with water, carefully tending to the flowers.

There’s photographs on Knox’s fridge. Himself and Olivia in her dorm room, taken by Knox. Himself and Knox, an intimate photo that no magazine had seen. It’s from tour, and surely taken by Neil. Knox has a pad of paper and a pencil, leaning into him, while his hand is on Knox’s knee. There’s a photo cut out from a magazine of the four of them, their cover of Time, and a list of some sort. It feels like home.

“Charlie?” Knox cocks his head, “What are you doing here?”

“How are you?”

“I’m great. I haven’t been so good in a long time.” Knox grins, “What are you doing here?”

“I missed you.”

“You saw me only a few days ago.”

“I miss you all the time.” His heart is so loud. Knox can definitely hear it.

“How are you? How’s Olivia?”

“I’m great. I haven’t felt this good in years. She’s great. Happy.”

“The flowers are beautiful.”

“Yes,” Charlie nods, “They’re your favorite.”

“Yeah,” Knox nods, “Do you want to read something I’ve been working on?”

“Sure,” Charlie agrees, because he doesn’t know how to say what he wants to. Should he just blurt it out? Should he push Knox against the counter and kiss him senseless? Should he wait any longer before he starts their lives together? He’s waited long enough already.

“It’s a book I’m working on. Poems.”

“Cool.”

“I wanted you to read this one.”

“Alright,” Charlie takes the paper from Knox’s hand, his scrawl odd

and comforting. Charlie loves him. He reads the words, not too long, but enough for silence to creep between the two.

“I just finished it.” Knox says, when he figures that Charlie is done. “I’ve just been in a writing frenzy lately.”

“It’s beautiful.” Charlie nods, handing him back the paper. “You’re in love.”

“It’s about you.”

Charlie smiles, although he feels a bit mischievous doing so. “I know.”

Knox sets his papers down before he pulls Charlie into a kiss. It occurs to Charlie that he’s never been in Knox’s bedroom. They haven’t kissed in a long while. It feels just as sweet as the first time. Knox tastes like home. Charlie’s pulling apart quickly, trying to stop himself from taking Knox’s pants off before it falls off of his tongue.

“Can I say it?”

“Yes,” Knox holds onto him, “Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.”

“I love you.” Charlie says the words he’s been trying to figure out since he was twelve, and they come out so easy it feels as though he’s been saying it for years.

“I love you too.” Knox grins so widely it looks as though it’s going to

crack in two.

“I’ve wanted to tell you that for so many years.”

“Me too. I love you, Charlie. I love you, I love you, I love you. I love you so much. So much. You’re in all my songs. You’re in everything I do. Everything I create. I’ve never loved anything as much as I love you. I don’t ever want to be in a world where I don’t love you.”

“You really wanted to say it back, didn’t you?”

“You have no idea. I love you.” Knox kisses him, “I love you,” He kisses his cheek, “I love you.” His eyelids. “I love you.” His forehead. “I love you.” His nose. “I love you.”

“I love you too, Knox.”

“I want everything with you. I want a picket fence and three kids and a dog and cat. I want to have Olivia over for Christmas and I want to wake up next to you every day for the rest of my life. I don’t want to go to Thanksgiving at your Dad’s house, and I don’t want to go to sleep thinking about our lives apart. I want your mornings, your afternoons. I want every time and all the times in between. I want to fly to Spain and take a trip to Amsterdam and if you wanted the moon, I would figure out how to get it down here for you.

“I’d do anything on Earth for you, Charlie. The last few years were the worst of my entire life. You weren’t yourself anymore. Neither was I. I loved you so much, but I had no idea how to tell you or how to help you. So I tried everything. I tried to sleep with you without falling in love even more. I tried to help you with rehab. I tried to keep it a secret. But I’m so bad at telling lies. I love you. I love you. You knew. I know you did. But I can say it aloud now. I can say it to you without

giving you lyrics for you to sing.”

Charlie realizes, vaguely, that he’s crying. “I love you.”

“I know.” Knox beams, “You should move in with me.”

“So fast,” Charlie tries to joke, but it falls flat through his tears.

“You want to spend forever with me.”

“Oh, don’t put words in my mouth. I want to spend every lifetime I have in every life with you.”

“I think I’ve been your friend every time.”

“I think I’ve been in love with you every time. Knox,” Charlie tries to say something else, but it’s mostly lost in the fog.

Knox kisses him again, and relishes in one simple fact. They don’t have to pull apart tonight. Or tomorrow. Or the day after. Or the day after that.

for your love

Chapter Summary

It’s all a little sentimental.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was two years later, Charlie was setting up some more lights on the Christmas tree while Knox tended to the dinner. Charlie had been helping with that earlier too, but he was currently preoccupied by setting up another string of lights on the tree.

There were going to be guests arriving soon. Neil and Todd, each with gifts that were surely going to be their best sellers. Neil’s book wasn’t anything about their band, although surely that was coming one day. This book was full of photographs of their band, but it was also just various band photography that Neil had done, accompanied by little anecdotes. Todd was surely going to bring his own book, How I Learned To Yawp. It was poetry.

Meeks and Pitts were also coming, surely bringing something that was thought out and planned months in advance. They would be staying for a majority of the holiday season, along with Neil and Todd. Cameron and Stick were coming as well, but of course, they were heading back to the city for New Years. Other than the two of them and Neil and Todd, nobody else lived in the city any longer.

Meeks and Pitts had moved to Maine, far away from it all on a piece of land that was so large that they had their own pond and a building that they’d made into a studio. Not really for music, but for tinkering around and woodworking and any other little hobby that they wanted to try. Meeks had taken up a position teaching at the local college, and every few months, Pitts came down to New York to record various albums or demos. He made good money as a studio musician, and he wasn’t too bothered by not making music of his own anymore. He was happy to live his little existence. It wasn’t as though they weren’t still

famous, that wasn't true, but they were certainly happier and more free than they had been in years.

Knox had his own novel like Neil and Todd which was sitting happily on their fireplace mantel (although he didn't think it belonged there anymore) and was one of Charlie's favorites books. A saga about growing up, learning to fall in love. And if there were any similarities to their own lives, no one mentioned anything. The mantel had various things upon it. Pictures of their friends, a photo of the two kissing that Neil had taken, and of course, a photo with Olivia in her graduation gown, Charlie's arm around her with big grins on their faces. Undergrad was over. She was going to Harvard.

"How's it going?" Knox called, an apron around his waist and flour all over him.

"Good, good." Charlie nodded, trying to figure out the plugs and how it was all going to turn on.

"You need any help?"

"No, I've got it."

"Alright," Knox padded back into the kitchen, and Charlie stepped back to admire his work. It was a few days until Christmas still, but this was going to be a great day. And besides, the house looked good. A little shuffling of feet turned Charlie's head to their dog, Al, who was still trying to find his footing, even if he was nearly six. They'd gotten him about a year ago from the shelter nearby their home. They were in New Hampshire now, and although nothing was really close, it was still nice to be able to go into town when they wanted and needed to.

“It smells amazing in here,” He grinned, coming up behind Knox and slipping his arms around him, flour and all.

“I know.” Knox smiled back, planting a kiss on Charlie’s lips. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“When do you think everybody’ll get here?”

“An hour or two at most. I think their trains are due a little later cause of the weather.”

“Alright,” He smiled, and then Charlie pulled away, letting Knox get back to his task.

The ringing of their phone was surprising, and Charlie walked over to grab it, not wanting Knox to have to do anything about it. He knew things with Knox had moved quickly. They had moved very fast from getting together to moving in to Charlie asking *Do you want to spend the rest of your life with me?* after they’d broken in their new bed. The timing was off, surely, but Knox had laughed and smiled and Charlie could have melted into a puddle on the floor.

“Charlie?”

”Olivia, hi!”

“I just wanted to call. School is hectic, and I’m finally home for the

holidays for a bit."

"How are you?"

"I'm great, like usual, well, per my last letter. How are you?"

"I'm great. Knox is too."

"Who is it?"

"Olivia!"

"Say hello!"

"He says hello."

"Hi, Knox," Charlie can practically hear her grin.

"I just wanted to call to see how you were. And I have some pretty exciting news."

"What is it?"

"I met a boy."

“Oh?”

“Yeah,” And there’s that sigh again, the one that signals she’s got a grin on her face. “I really like him, Charlie.”

“What’s his name?”

“Andrew. He’s a year older than me but we’re in two classes together. We went to the art house cinema last week to see that movie that Knox wrote me about, and it was wonderful. I’m really excited. I haven’t liked somebody like this in a long, long time. If ever.”

“Oh, sweetheart, I’m so happy for you.”

“He’s really great. I just had to tell you about it.”

“I’m happy you did. I’ll be sure to tell Knox all about this Andrew.”

From his spot at the stove, Knox raised an eyebrow, a smirk on his face. *Andrew*? he mouthed.

“I love you, Charlie, but I gotta go. I’m actually calling from a restaurant my sister and I are at. I just was telling her about him and I realized I hadn’t told you yet and that couldn’t do.”

“Love you too, Liv.”

“Okay. Have a good holiday. Bye-bye.”

“Bye,” He repeated, and then when she hung up the phone, he relied to Knox her story about Andrew and the art house cinema film they’d seen together.

So the day passes quickly. They both wonder if sometimes it goes too quickly, now that they’re in love. It’s easy to be in love like this.

Everybody eventually arrives, gifts and grins and warm hugs and everything else wrapping them all up together. They’re all happy, for the most part. It’s refreshing to be a little family, having found each other.

Meeks and Pitts are happy up where they are, far away from people who ask questions about their rock star lives. They don’t get recognized often, and they’re happy to live where they do. It’s wonderful, and it seems as though they’re never going to be short on happiness when they’re together.

Cameron and Stick were happy too. Stick was trying to adopt a kid, and it was proving to be a laborious process, even though he was never short on funds or anything of the sort. They were happy, and it was evident in how they shuffled around with each other, even in the spacious house that Charlie and Knox owned.

Neil and Todd were happy to share everything that they’d been working on with everyone. They were immensely happy. It was beautiful. It was wonderful.

It was a nice moment in time, to sit with their oldest friends and talk about life. Their lives, in particular, were always changing. They had always been go, go, go. Now, it seemed as if everyone, even Stick and Cameron, were able to slow down.

Charlie cleaned the dishes with Neil and Pitts as the rest talked and drank coffee, reminiscing within ear shot. Charlie was, as he realized from the burning in his chest, incredibly happy. He was so happy, in fact, that he wasn't sure how he was ever going to get over it. He never wanted to.

After everyone had been squared away in various rooms for the night, Knox curled into bed with Charlie, kissing him on the forehead.

"I love you," He grinned, "And I love this life we have. I love everything about you."

"I love you too, Knox." Charlie pressed a kiss to his mouth, cuddling up against him, trying to pull them closer together.

"You're my best friend. Always."

"You're mine too. And you're the only person I'd ever trust to love me as good as you do."

Knox blushed from the repeat of words he'd said long ago to Charlie, but they snuggled even closer together. They were happy, their dog was snoring peacefully at the foot of the bed, and their house was full of people that loved them during the holidays. It was beautiful, and oh-so special. And they were together. And that, in the end, was all that seemed to matter.

Chapter End Notes

thank you my dear readers - agh for those of you still here I adore you! Loved writing this story - quite special to me. Of course I

will be making much more DPS content in the future so keep on the lookout :-)

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